

The Hermeneutics of Conditionalism: A Defense of the Interpretive Method of Edward Fudge

Christopher M. Date

Christopher M. Date is a graduate student, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California

Key Words: hermeneutics; hell; eternal punishment; conditional immortality; annihilationism; Edward Fudge; The Fire That Consumes

My friend, Edward William Fudge, passed away on November 25, 2017, after this article was accepted for publication. I am thankful I had the opportunity to speak to him on the phone before his passing and to give him the good news that my article supporting him was to be published. The truth, however, is that Edward cared little about vindication. His intelligence, wisdom, and wit were exceeded only by his humility, and he was more than willing to be maligned in the service of his Lord and love, Jesus Christ. On the Day of Judgment, whether Edward learns that he was right or wrong on the topic of hell or any other issue, his deepest desire will surely be to hear that he had faithfully shown the gracious love of Jesus to the many with whom he shared it, just as he had received it. And I have no doubt that he will hear those words we should all likewise long to hear: ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’

In his preface to the first edition of *The Fire That Consumes*, Edward Fudge invites readers to carefully scrutinize his case for the doctrines of annihilationism and conditional immortality, collectively referred to hereafter as *conditionalism*. ‘I have tried’, he writes, ‘to follow the ordinary methods of sound, biblical exegesis’, and he encourages readers, ‘Check the statements made here. Weigh the evidence. Examine the arguments. Measure this work by every proper standard’.¹ Fudge’s invitation was accepted a decade later by Robert Peterson, who presented a paper at the 1994 Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) Convention entitled ‘The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism: The Theological Method of Edward Fudge’.²

Having set out ‘to evaluate [Fudge’s] hermeneutic within the framework of his theological methodology’, in the end Peterson rejects Fudge’s case, saying, ‘I have

1 Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment* (Houston: Providential, 1982), xv.

2 The paper would go on to be published in *Evangelical Hermeneutics: Selected Essays from the 1994 Evangelical Theological Society Convention*, ed. by Michael Bauman and David Hall (Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1995), 191–212.

evaluated Fudge's use of the Old Testament, appeal to linguistics, avoidance of texts and of opposing arguments, logical fallacies and appeal to systematic theology', and 'I conclude that Fudge's case for conditionalism is not as strong as he and others have thought'.³ Indeed, Peterson contends that 'evaluated in terms of hermeneutics and theological methodology, [Fudge's] case appears to be weak'.⁴

Meanwhile, however, evangelical giant John Stott had already intimated that he leaned toward conditionalism for scriptural reasons, following the earlier, more confident affirmations of other evangelical scholars.⁵ In the years since Peterson's paper was published, a number of conservative evangelicals have become convinced of conditionalism, including recently Terrance Tiessen.⁶ John Stackhouse recently wrote that conditionalism 'enjoys about as strong a warrant in Scripture as ... any doctrine'.⁷ Particularly relevant to Peterson's stated conclusion is that Anthony Thiselton has also affirmed conditionalism, himself a recognized authority in hermeneutics and interpretation.⁸ The late I. Howard Marshall appears also to have inclined toward conditionalism, himself accomplished in the areas of hermeneutics and exegesis.⁹

What, then, is one to make of Peterson's hermeneutical assessment of the case for conditionalism? If it is as weak as he insists it is, why are conservative evangelical scholars increasingly embracing it? Why have even *experts* in hermeneutics like Thiselton affirmed it?

In this paper I will argue that in fact, when one applies accepted principles of hermeneutics and interpretation in the task of exegeting Old and New Testa-

3 Ibid., 192, 209.

4 Ibid., 209.

5 David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 312–320; reproduced in John R. W. Stott, 'Judgment and Hell', in *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism*, ed. by Christopher M. Date, Gregory G. Stump, and Joshua W. Anderson (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 48–55. For prominent, conservative affirmations of conditionalism prior to Stott's, see Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality* (Taunton, UK: Phoenix, n.d.); John W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1974); and Stephen H. Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).

6 Terrance L. Tiessen, 'My Long Journey to Annihilationism', in *A Consuming Passion: Essays on Hell and Immortality in Honor of Edward Fudge*, ed. by Christopher M. Date and Ron Highfield (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 17–31.

7 John G. Stackhouse Jr., 'Terminal Punishment', in *Four Views on Hell*, 2nd edn, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 61–100 (62).

8 Anthony C. Thiselton, 'Claims about "Hell" and Wrath', in *Life after Death: A New Approach to the Last Things*, 145–165 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

9 I. Howard Marshall, 'The New Testament Does *Not* Teach Universal Salvation', in *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, ed. by Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 55–76 (60, n.12); and *Aspects of the Atonement: Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity* (Colorado Springs, CO; Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), 33, n.48.

ment texts, one will conclude that they teach conditionalism, and not the traditional view of hell. Along the way I will also attempt a rebuttal of some of Peterson's hermeneutical and interpretive claims.

I. *Sedes Doctrinae* and the Scope of Conditionalism

Walter Kaiser rightly denounces the practice of proof-texting, 'the facile linking of assorted Biblical texts because of what appears on a *prima facie* reading to be similar wording or subject matter'.¹⁰ He praises John F. Johnson's insistence that 'doctrine must be deduced from those passages [actually] referring to the doctrine under question'—its *sedes doctrinae*, or 'seat of doctrine'.¹¹ Of course as evangelicals we ought to affirm not only the doctrine of *solā Scriptura*—the sufficiency and ultimate authority of Scripture—but also *tota Scriptura*—the unity and internal consistency of all biblical teaching. Still, a doctrine's basis ought to consist primarily of texts which directly teach on the subject at hand.

This interpretive principle poses a bit of a problem for traditionalists—those who affirm the historically dominant view of hell as eternal torment—because few biblical texts qualify as *sedes doctrinae* for any doctrine focused specifically on what takes place in hell. Conditionalism, on the other hand, is about *more* than the nature of hell, and sits comfortably atop a much larger seat of doctrine.

Most familiar to its critics is conditionalism's contrast with the belief of most Christians that the damned will be raised back to life from the dead, and go on living and suffering forever in hell.¹² Conditionalists think instead that in hell, the resurrected lost will be annihilated—by which is not meant that they will instantaneously vanish into the proverbial ether, but that they will be denied the gift of immortality, deprived of all life of any sort, and punished with everlasting death, probably brought about by painful means as are most forms of execution.

10 Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1981), 135.

11 John F. Johnson, 'Analogia Fidei as Hermeneutical Principle', *The Springfielder* 36 (1972–73), 249–259 (253); Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 135.

12 Although it has become somewhat fashionable in recent years to affirm the traditional view while denying that the lost will be 'immortal' and 'live forever' in hell, this is little more than obfuscation. Traditionalists believe the lost will one day be resurrected, raised back to life from the dead (conditionalists agree) and will go on physically living forever (conditionalists do not agree); *ergo* they believe the lost will, in fact, be immortal and live forever. Hence Peterson affirms, 'I believe in the immortality of human beings (united in body and soul after the resurrection of the dead)' (Edward William Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000], 88), and Wayne Grudem writes that the lost will 'live forever in hell' (*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Leicester: Inter-Varsity and Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000], 657). Ronnie Demler ('Sic et Non: Traditionalism's Scandal', in *A Consuming Passion: Essays on Hell and Immortality in Honor of Edward Fudge* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015], 255–276) demonstrates that historically traditionalists have not shied away from using such language to describe the fate of the wicked.

More fundamentally, however, conditionalism is a view of who will endure in life and enjoy length of days forever; who will be immortal. Whereas most Christians think all human beings are or will be immortal, conditionalists believe immortality is a gift God will grant only to those who meet the *condition* of being united in faith to the immortal One who redeemed them. Conditionalism is therefore also a view of the gospel, of the *telos* of salvation. Most Christians on the one hand—and most of the broader, unbelieving world—seem to think that the gospel is about going to heaven instead of hell. Conditionalists, on the other hand, maintain that the gospel is primarily about receiving life everlasting in God’s glorious kingdom, rather than finally perishing, whatever the nature of one’s existence between death and resurrection.¹³

Thus, conditionalism’s *sedes doctrinae*—its seat of doctrine—can be likened to a stool with three legs, each representing a body of biblical texts collectively conveying one of these themes: life from death as the *telos* of the gospel; immortality as a gift granted only to the saved; and death and destruction as what happens in hell.¹⁴

II. The *Telos* of the Gospel

The first leg of the stool is the *telos* of the gospel. New Testament and Pauline scholar Douglas Moo argues that the gospel is the theme of Paul’s letter to the Romans.¹⁵ And according to Paul, the gospel is about being rescued from death unto life. So he says in Romans 6:23, ‘the wages of sin is *death* [θάνατος], but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (emphasis added).¹⁶ The Greek word θάνατος had by Paul’s time a long semantic history, from Homer through the Hellenic and Hellenistic periods and into Greco-Roman thought, during which it usually referred to ordinary death, the end of mortal life.¹⁷ This is

13 This does not preclude a temporary disembodied intermediate state between death and resurrection, a torturous one for the lost and a blissful one in ‘heaven’ for the saved, as affirmed by dualist conditionalists.

14 These are not the only three themes and corresponding sets of biblical texts that can serve as conditionalism’s *sedes doctrinae*. Alongside the themes of immortality to the saved and destruction for the lost, Glenn Peoples (‘Introduction to Evangelical Conditionalism’, in *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism*, ed. by Christopher M. Date, Gregory G. Stump, and Joshua W. Anderson [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014], 10–24 [18–20]) adds what he calls ‘the vision of eternity spelled out by the biblical writers’, pointing to texts like Ephesians 1:9–10, 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, and Isaiah 2:3 and 11:9 which indicate that ‘Creation itself will be brought into a state of sinless perfection to the praise of God’s glory’, while ‘the dualistic portrait of eternity with heaven on one side and hell on the other finds no home in Scripture’.

15 Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1996), 29–30.

16 Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Standard Bible Society, 2001).

17 *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 404–405.

also its normal meaning in the Septuagint (LXX) Greek translation of the OT, and in the NT.¹⁸ On its face, then, Romans 6:23 lends itself to conditionalism's view of the gospel, and challenges traditionalism's contention that the gospel delivers from a fate of eternal life in torment to a fate of eternal life in bliss.

It is sometimes alleged, however, that 'in an extended sense, the concept of death can be applied to a manner of life that is disobedient to God ... apart from fellowship with God'¹⁹—*spiritual* death, as it were. This may be true; conditionalists need not dispute this. Indeed, it is 'the *physical* contrast between life and death' that even makes it possible to use these words to contrast 'the moral and *spiritual* difference between a life spent in the fear of the Lord, and a life in the service of sin'.²⁰ What does not follow is that this may be the meaning of death in Romans 6:23. Typically citing Ephesians 2:1 or Colossians 2:13, in which Paul refers to living people as dead, traditionalists often commit the fallacy D. A. Carson calls the 'unwarranted adoption of an expanded semantic field', or 'illegitimate totality transfer', which is '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'.²¹ As an example, Carson offers *ἐκκλησία* as used by Stephen in Acts 7:38. Even though 'church' is within the word's semantic range, surely Stephen does not here mean a congregation of Christians when he uses the word to describe the Israelites waiting for Moses at the base of Mount Sinai.²² The question, then, is not whether death *can* be used spiritually; the question is what *Paul* means by death *in Romans 6:23*.

To answer this question, one employs the *grammatical-historical method* of exegesis, which 'attempts to uncover the meaning that a text would have had to its original human author and readers'.²³ Thoroughly applying this method is impossible in a short paper such as this, but space does permit a brief consideration of what Grant Osborne calls 'the most basic factor in interpretation', namely the 'logical context' or *literary context*.²⁴

18 Ibid., 406, 410.

19 Ibid., 408; Peter H. Davids, 'Death', in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 602–604 (603).

20 Herman Bavinck, 'Death', in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. by James Orr (Chicago, IL: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 811–813 (812), emphasis added.

21 D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 60–61.

22 Ibid.

23 Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, 2nd edn (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 120.

24 Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd edn (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 39. McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 149, call it 'textual context'. I have here emphasized the label offered by G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 85.

In the immediate literary context of Romans 6:23, Paul is contrasting the end or fruit of slavery to sin—death—with the end or fruit of slavery to God—sanctification and eternal life (vv. 20–23). This he offers to his readers as reason to be obedient as slaves to their new master—righteousness—having been set free from slavery under their former master—sin (vv. 15–19). In support of his claim that followers of Christ have been released from the law, Paul goes on to appeal analogically to the legal dissolution of marriage that follows a spouse's *death* (7:1–6), using a verbal cognate of the noun θάνατος.²⁵ What Paul means by death, then, in the immediate context of Romans 6:23, is apparently literal death as ordinarily understood.

An objection might be raised at this point on the grounds that Paul here says believers 'have died to the law' (7:4; cf. v. 6), having earlier said they have 'died to sin' (6:2; cf. vv. 7, 11). This, one might argue, suggests that by death Paul means something like separation. Yet Paul is not saying that living believers are literally dead, nor defining death as separation (in this case from sin and the law). Rather, Paul is saying believers have been united to Christ in *his* literal, physical death. As he explains, 'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?' (6:3). The death Paul has in view here, then, is death as ordinarily understood, the death Jesus died. What is more, the expressions 'died to sin' and 'died to the law' are comparable to the idiom, 'You are dead to me'. No one upon hearing this thinks one is dead in any sense. Instead, one naturally understands it to mean, '*It is as if* you are dead to me'. Sin and the law, in Paul's view, have no power or authority over believers because, having been baptized into Christ's *literal* death, they are *as if* dead themselves.

Unfazed, the hypothetical objector may point out that Paul goes on to say that 'apart from the law, sin lies dead', and that 'when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died' because 'sin ... killed me' (7:8–9, 11). Later, too, he says of the living Christian that her 'body is dead' (8:10). Commentators are not in perfect agreement on what these sayings mean, but some of the explanations that have been offered are consonant with how Paul has thus far been using the language of death. Citing Romans 4:15 as support, Robert Mounce takes 'sin lies dead' to mean 'that undefined, it technically *does not exist*'.²⁶ Morris understands 'sin came alive and I died' as meaning that 'it was no longer possible to overlook [sin's] existence', and metaphorically 'it killed forever the proud Pharisee ... the happy sinner', marking 'the *end* of self-confidence, self-satisfaction, self-reliance'.²⁷ That a believer's 'body is dead' is interpreted by Moo as prolepsis, a reference to 'the penalty of [future] physical death that must still be experienced

25 Translated 'death' in Rom. 6:15, 21, 23, and 7:5, the noun θάνατος shares a root with and corresponds basically in meaning to the verb ἀποθνήσκω, translated 'dies' in 7:2 and 4.

26 Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, New American Commentary, 27 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 164; emphasis added.

27 Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans and Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1988), 282.

by the believer', as if it were a present reality.²⁸

Meanwhile, Paul had said earlier that 'sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin' (v. 12), but 'much more will those who receive the ... free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ' (v. 17). That Paul has in mind the ordinary meaning of death is clear from verse 14 in which he explains that virtually everyone died from Adam to Moses despite the lack of the Law.²⁹ Moo thus acknowledges the physical character of the death Paul has in mind here in Romans 5, writing, 'Paul may focus on physical death as the evidence, the outward manifestation of this total death; or, better, he may simply have in mind this death in both its physical and spiritual aspects.'³⁰ Whatever the case, in Romans 5 Paul contrasts a sin-induced, minimally physical death on the one hand, with the free gift of life in Christ on the other. Paul's contrast in Romans 6:23, therefore, between a sin-induced death and the free gift of life in Christ, is best understood as likewise referring to a minimally physical death.

Throughout the book of Romans, in fact, θάνατος and its cognates refer to ordinary death. Paul uses the noun in this way over and over again leading up to Romans 6:23, in many of which cases it is said to be the due penalty or result of sin.³¹ He uses the verbs ἀποθνήσκω and θανατόω to refer to the literal death of Christ and others.³² The adjective θνητός is frequently used of the state of being literally dead.³³ From an analysis, then, of the immediate context of Romans 6:23, and its larger context—the book of Romans as a whole—one can conclude with good reason that in Paul's view, the gospel of Jesus Christ aims to rescue sinners from death as ordinarily understood, by means of the free gift of everlasting life.

This should come as no surprise, for in the most famous verse in the Bible, Jesus says in John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.' When used in the middle voice of human beings, as it is here, the Greek ἀπόλλυμι, translated 'perish', means to die.³⁴ In fact, Jesus had just said in verses 14 and 15 that like Moses's bronze serpent which saved the lives of those who had been otherwise fatally bitten by snakes (Num. 21:6, 9), 'so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life'.

The gospel, then, is not meant to rescue sinners from an eternal life in miserable separation from God unto an eternal life in blissful communion with him. As the first leg in the stool that is conditionalism's seat of doctrine, the gospel is

28 Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 491.

29 One notable exception appears to be Enoch (Heb. 11:5; cf. Gen. 5:24).

30 Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 320.

31 1:32; 5:10, 12, 14, 17, 21; 6:3, 5, 9, 16. Also probably 6:4, 21.

32 5:6–8; 6:8–10; 7:2–3; 8:34, 36; 14:7–9, 15.

33 1:4; 4:17, 24; 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11; 10:7, 9; 11:15; 14:9.

34 *BDAG*, s.v. 'ἀπόλλυμι'. Cf. Matt. 8:25; 26:52; Mark 4:38; Luke 8:24; 11:51; 13:3, 5, 33; 15:17; John 11:50; Acts 5:37; 1 Cor. 10:9, 10; 2 Pet. 3:6; Jude 11.

about saving lives altogether, rescuing sinners from certain death by granting them eternal life in the community of God's redeemed people.

III. Eternal Life and Eternal Punishment

Defenders of the traditional view of hell will often at this point argue that 'eternal life' does not mean living forever, but refers instead to a particular *quality* of life *enjoyed* forever. Peterson, for example, thinks the phrase does not emphasize the everlasting duration of life itself, but the duration of the communion with Father and Son enjoyed by believers. As he writes in rebuttal to Fudge, citing John 17:3, 'Eternal life consists of knowing the Father and the Son for ever; its converse, the second death, involves being deprived of God's fellowship for ever'.³⁵

Yet Peterson's interpretation of John 17:3 is not the only one possible, or even the most obvious. It is true that Jesus says, 'this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent'. However, the copula—the verb εἰμί, translated 'is'—often means something other than 'is identical to'. By assuming that this is the word's meaning in John 17:3, traditionalists commit another one of Carson's exegetical fallacies, that which he calls the 'unwarranted restriction of the semantic field'.³⁶ In fact, Carson uses this very word to illustrate the fallacy, demonstrating that there are at least four other possible uses of the copula besides conveying identity. One such use is to convey *cause*, as an example of which Carson offers Romans 8:6, in which Paul writes, 'to set the mind on the flesh is [εἰμί] death'.³⁷ Paul does not here mean that setting the mind on the flesh is identical to death, but that it causes, brings about, or leads to death.

In the gospel of John, Jesus is recorded using the copula εἰμί together with ζωή as a predicate noun in three texts, two besides John 17:3. In both of those other texts, Jesus uses εἰμί to convey cause, not identity. He says in John 12:50 that the Father's 'commandment is [εἰμί] eternal life'. Carson observes that here Jesus indicates 'God's command ... *leads to eternal life*'.³⁸ Similarly, in John 6:63 Jesus uses the copula to say, 'The words that I have spoken to you are [εἰμί] spirit and life'. Commenting on this text, Leon Morris writes that 'Jesus' words are creative utterances. They not only tell of life; they *bring* life', pointing to John 5:24 in which Jesus says, 'whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life'.³⁹

Likewise, faith in and communion with the Father and the Son *bring about* eternal life. After all, elsewhere Jesus says, 'everyone who believes in me shall never die' (John 11:26). John Calvin thus explains John 17:3, saying Jesus 'now

35 Fudge and Peterson, *Two View of Hell*, 147.

36 Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 56; emphasis added.

37 *Ibid.*, 58.

38 D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester: Inter-Varsity and Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 452–453.

39 Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, rev. edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 341; emphasis added.

describes how he gives life: it is when he enlightens the elect in the true knowledge of God. He is not here speaking about the enjoyment of life that we hope for, but only about how people *obtain* life'.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, variations of the phrase 'eternal life' (ζωὴν αἰώνιον) refer literally to everlasting life in contemporaneous Jewish literature. In 1 Enoch 15:4, for example, Enoch is told that the angelic Watchers were 'living forever' (ζῶντα αἰώνια) in contrast with mortal human beings who 'die and perish'.⁴¹ According to Psalms of Solomon 3:10–12, sinners die and will not be resurrected, but the righteous will rise to an 'eternal life' (ζωὴν αἰώνιον) that 'shall never end'.⁴² And in Wisdom of Solomon 5:13–15, the unrighteous realize they will cease to be and that the righteous will 'live for evermore' (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ζῶσιν).⁴³

Eternal life features, however, in one of the three passages which receive special attention by Peterson, and which traditionalists often allege is extremely challenging to conditionalism.⁴⁴ As the conclusion to his parable of the judgment of the sheep and goats, Jesus says, 'these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life' (Matt. 25:46). If eternal life is an everlasting experience of living, surely eternal punishment is an everlasting experience of being punished—or so the reasoning goes. Yet the text does not say that; it says only that the life of some will be eternal, and that the punishment of others will be eternal. Nothing else about these two fates is equated.

In fact, although the repeated use of the adjective αἰώνιος requires that both fates are equally everlasting, the judicial context requires that they be mutually exclusive in nature: *only* the righteous will live forever; the fate of the unrighteous must therefore be death forever. This does not require an ongoing experience of being punished forever; as noted by Fudge, when αἰώνιος describes what he calls 'words of action'—that is, 'nouns signifying acts or processes, as distinct from persons or things'—it 'usually describes the issue or result of the action rather than the action itself'.⁴⁵ In Hebrews 9:12, for example, Jesus is said to have 'once for all' secured 'eternal redemption'. The process of redeeming lasted for a

40 John Calvin, *John*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 391; emphasis added.

41 The original Greek of 1 Enoch and Psalms of Solomon is from Ken Penner and Michael S. Heiser, *Old Testament Greek Pseudepigrapha with Morphology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2008). English translation is from George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: The Hermeneia Translation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012), 36.

42 English translation is from James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 2: Expansions of the 'Old Testament' and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 655.

43 Greek is from Henry Barclay Swete, *The Old Testament in Greek According to the Septuagint*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909). English is from Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton, *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament: English Translation* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1870).

44 Peterson, 'The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism', 193.

45 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 44–50.

time and was thenceforth done, never to be repeated. Yet its outcome—redemption—is everlasting. Likewise, the process of punishing the lost—that is, the act of executing them—may last for a time, but its outcome—the punishment of death—will be everlasting.

In his 1994 response to Fudge, Peterson leaves this argument unaddressed, instead accusing Fudge of arguing diachronically from the semantic history of the Greek noun *κόλασις*, translated ‘punishment’.⁴⁶ In reality, Fudge does nothing of the sort, noting the word’s history only in passing.⁴⁷ Instead, he points out that in the LXX, *κόλασις* refers at times to punishments primarily intended to cause suffering, and at other times the punishment of death.⁴⁸

In his later published dialogue with Fudge, Peterson argues that Fudge’s appeal to words of action lacks the support of linguists.⁴⁹ In fact, while apparently no linguist has made precisely the same argument Fudge does, linguists are well aware of the peculiar ability of what they call ‘action nominals’ or ‘deverbal nouns’ in multiple languages to refer either to a verb’s process or to its result.⁵⁰ ‘This is a phenomenon’, one such linguist writes, ‘called logical polysemy’, a ‘central and widespread’ type of which, closely related to these nouns, ‘concerns the distinction between process and result meanings of event referring nouns’.⁵¹ As another pair of linguists explain, the word ‘translation’ refers to an event or process in ‘I have completed the translation of the first book’, but it refers to a result in ‘I wish to quote a translation of that wonderful text’.⁵² Similarly, although ‘punishment’ may refer to a process of suffering, *capital* punishment refers to the lifelessness that *results* from being punished, as noted even by Augustine.⁵³

Peterson further objects to Fudge’s argument, insisting that ‘eternal life’ disproves the rule, and suggesting that Hebrews 7:24–25 does indeed teach that Jesus will forever be saving his people.⁵⁴ However, the noun ‘life’ may not exhibit the aforementioned polysemy. If it does, a result reading consistent with that of ‘eternal punishment’ makes perfect sense: living forever is the eternal result of being raised to immortal life. And the passage Peterson cites in Hebrews does not say Jesus will be forever saving his people. At most, it says he will be doing so as long as intercession must be made on their behalf, which will no longer be the case when what was sown perishable, dishonorable, weak, and natural is raised

46 Peterson, ‘The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism’, 196.

47 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 196–197.

48 *Ibid.*, 197.

49 Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 96.

50 Elisabetta Ježek and Chiara Melloni, ‘Nominals, Polysemy, and Co-predication’, *Journal of Cognitive Science* 12 (2011), 1–31 (2); Øivin Andersen, ‘Deverbal Nouns as Hybrids: Some Textual Aspects’, *Evidence-Based LSP: Translation, Text and Terminology*, ed. by Khurshid Ahmad and Margaret Rogers (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 155–170 (156).

51 Andersen, ‘Deverbal Nouns as Hybrids’, 164.

52 Ježek and Melloni, ‘Nominals, Polysemy, and Co-predication’, 2.

53 *City of God*, 21.11.1.

54 Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 96–97.

imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual (1 Cor. 15:42–44), after which the new heavens and earth will forever be free from what is unclean, detestable, or false (Rev. 21:27).

Conditionalism, then, offers the most sensible reading of Matthew 25:46: the saved will be raised to life forever, and the lost will be punished with death forever.

IV. Immortality and Historical Theology

Returning now to conditionalism's seat of doctrine, a second leg of the stool consists of texts which indicate that immortality is a gift God will grant only to the saved. Genesis 3, as a starting point, records mankind's fall into mortality: in verse 19 God declares that as a consequence of Adam's sin, 'to dust you shall return', and in verses 22 and 23 he evicts Adam and Eve from the garden so that, lacking access to the tree of life, they will not 'eat, and live forever'.

This penalty was not some sort of *spiritual* death or separation from God. As Kenneth Mathews explains,

Adam's death is portrayed by the dreadful wordplay on his creation and essential physical constitution as the 'dust' (*'āpār*) of the 'ground' (*'āḏāmā*) (2:7; Eccl 3:20; Ps 103:14). His 'return' will be from whence he came: *'ādām* will become once again *'āḏāmā* ('ground')... . Death comes by the reversal ('returns') of the man's God-given state, that is, a 'living being' (2:7). This reversal is the deterioration of the body that will 'return' to the dust from which it was made (cf. Job 10:9; Ps 104:29).⁵⁵

But Mathews goes on to note that 'God did not execute the [death] penalty by taking Adam's life but by banning him from the rejuvenating power of the tree of life. Though not excommunicated from the divine presence (4:1–2), Adam's expulsion from the garden sealed his doom and that of all who followed'.⁵⁶ Thus, as noted above, Paul says in Romans 5:12 that 'sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin'.

Critics of conditionalism will often argue from Genesis 2:17 that death means separation, in this case from God, since many translations depict God as saying Adam would die 'in [or on] the day' he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁵⁷ If God did not lie, it is argued, Adam and Eve must therefore have died *in some sense* the very day they ate of the fruit, and since they did not immediately keel over dead, they must have died in some spiritual sense: they must have been separated relationally from God. However, the Hebrew construct here translated 'in the day'—יָמָאֵם—is just an idiom meaning 'when'. Thus the New English Translation reads, 'when you eat from it you will surely die'. This need

55 Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary, 1A (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 253.

56 *Ibid.*, 254.

57 ESV, NASB, N/RSV, N/KJV, HCSB, LEB, ASV; see also GNT, MSG, YLT.

not be understood woodenly any more than when one says, ‘When you eat too much, you get fat’. Had the warning been that Adam’s death would take place on the very day he ate, God might have used the demonstrative pronoun, as Moses did in Exodus 13:8 to instruct the people to tell their children of God’s deeds on the seventh day of Passover: בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא —‘on *that* day’ (emphasis added).

Thankfully the hope of immortality is not forever lost—but it is found *only* in Christ. The tree of life, which would have sustained the lives of Adam and Eve indefinitely, makes a reappearance at the other end of the Bible in the conclusion to John’s apocalyptic vision, where in Revelation 22:2 the saved—and they alone—enjoy its fruit. Jesus says in Luke 20:35–36 that the sons of God will be unable to die anymore, implying the lost will remain able to die. In his resurrection magnum opus, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:53 that at the resurrection believers will be made fit to inherit the kingdom of God, having ‘put on immortality’—the Greek *ἀθανασία*, another cognate of *θάνατος*, literally meaning deathlessness. So Mathews adds this conditioned ray of hope to his aforementioned commentary on Genesis 3:19: ‘only through the last Adam, who insures the “life-giving spirit”, does human mortality take on the garments of immortality (1 Cor. 15:35–58)’.⁵⁸

Here is as good an opportunity as any to let tradition play its proper role in one’s interpretive methodology. ‘Tradition’, explain Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, ‘preserves what has been learned in the church about the biblical text and its theological framework over the centuries, and it is folly to insist on “standing on our own two feet” rather than on the shoulders of giants.’⁵⁹ Fudge himself, in the opening chapter of *The Fire That Consumes*, writes, ‘If someone begins to suspect that he alone has discovered a certain truth, he has good reason to doubt its validity. The chances are good that “if it’s true it isn’t new, and if it’s new it isn’t true”’.⁶⁰ But McCartney and Clayton issue this caution: ‘we must always be ready to stand back and evaluate tradition’.⁶¹

The traditional view is called the *traditional* view for a reason: it has dominated the Christian tradition for centuries, as illustrated by how it has often answered the question of who shall receive immortality. In the second century, Tatian wrote that the lost soul ‘rises again at the last at the end of the world with the body’ and will ‘receive ... the painful with immortality’.⁶² Some 300 years later, Augustine likewise affirmed that immortality ‘shall be hereafter in the bodies of the damned’.⁶³ Over a thousand years later, article thirty-seven of the Reformation’s Belgic Confession reads, ‘the wicked ... being immortal, shall be tormented in that everlasting fire’.⁶⁴ William Shedd, writing another two and a

58 Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 254.

59 McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 71.

60 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 22–23.

61 McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 71.

62 *Address to the Greeks*, 13–14.

63 *City of God*, 21.3.2.

64 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882), 3:435.

half centuries later, said ‘man ... is an immortal being.’⁶⁵ The examples are easily multiplied.

But even earlier than Tatian, Ignatius of Antioch had in the first century said the broken body of Jesus ‘is the medicine of immortality [ἀθανασία], and the antidote to prevent us from dying ... that we should live for ever in Jesus Christ.’⁶⁶ Second-century Irenaeus of Lyons wrote that celestial bodies were called into existence by God, by whose will they continue to exist, and that likewise it is by his will that the saved are granted ‘continuance ... [and] length of days for ever and ever’, whereas the one who rejects his gift ‘deprives himself of continuance ... [and] length of days for ever and ever.’⁶⁷ A hundred years before Augustine, Arnobius of Sicca explicitly denied that the lost will be immortal, and said they will be cast into unquenchable fire ‘which leaves nothing behind’, inducing ‘the last end—annihilation’.⁶⁸

With Augustine’s stamp of approval in the fifth century, the universal immortalization of all mankind came to dominate Christian thought, but Ignatius, Irenaeus, Arnobius, and others spoke with an earlier, contrary voice. Tradition’s role in hermeneutics does not, therefore, demand an alternative to the plain reading of the biblical texts above, which appear to teach that only the saved will be granted immortality. This second leg of the stool that is conditionalism’s seat of doctrine, with the support of several early, respected Christian thinkers, powerfully challenges the tradition that has dominated since, which maintains the lost will be immortal as well.

V. Immortality and the ‘Big Three’

So what motivates the tradition to deny the Bible’s apparent teaching concerning immortality? Peterson offers a partial answer to that question in his own affirmation of universal human immortality. Citing Matthew 25:46, he writes, ‘I believe in the immortality of human beings ... because the Bible teaches that there will be “eternal punishment” for the lost and “eternal life” for the saved.’⁶⁹ A similar statement is made by Christopher Morgan, Peterson’s co-editor of *Hell Under Fire*: ‘It seems clear’, Morgan writes, ‘from Revelation 20:10 ... that Satan, the beast, and the false prophet are punished forever. Do they somehow have *inherent* immortality? Of course not.’ Their immortality is *contingent*: ‘God will keep them in existence endlessly in order to punish them.’⁷⁰

65 William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3rd edn (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003), 896.

66 *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 20.

67 *Against Heresies*, 2.34.3.

68 *Against the Heathen*, 2.14.

69 Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 88–89.

70 Christopher W. Morgan, ‘Annihilationism: Will the Unsaved be Punished Forever?’ in *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, ed. by Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 195–218 (205); emphasis added.

So traditionalists reject the plain reading of some biblical texts that appear to condition immortality upon salvation, on the basis of their reading of others they think teach the lost will be tormented forever. In particular, the two texts cited by Peterson and Morgan, together with Revelation 14:9–11, make up what conditionalists sometimes affectionately call the ‘big three’—the texts often alleged by traditionalists to be most damning to conditionalism. Peterson says these three texts, among all others, ‘have figured *most* prominently in the history of the doctrine of hell.’⁷¹

Peterson points to Matthew 25:46—which has already been examined—claiming that a ‘feature of Fudge’s hermeneutic is his occasional avoidance of aspects of biblical passages that are difficult to reconcile with conditionalism.’⁷² Five verses earlier Jesus says the wicked will depart ‘into the eternal fire prepared for the devil’ (v. 41), and as Peterson notes, ‘Traditionalists since Augustine have interpreted Scripture by Scripture and gone to Revelation 20:10 for help in understanding’ this fire, for in that text John sees the devil, beast, and false prophet tormented forever and ever in a lake of fire.⁷³ Fudge, on the other hand, does not make this connection.

In fact, it is traditionalists like Peterson who make the hermeneutical mistake here, not Fudge. From an evangelical view of the divine inspiration of Scripture arises the principle of *analogia fidei*, or ‘analogy of faith’. R. C. Sproul appears to view this as the ‘*primary* rule of hermeneutics’, according to which ‘no part of Scripture can be interpreted in such a way as to render it in conflict with what is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture.’⁷⁴ And from the *analogia fidei* follows a well-accepted hermeneutical principle which, in the words of the Westminster Divines, holds that ‘when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly’ (WCF 1.9). As summarized by McCartney and Clayton, ‘obscure passages of Scripture should be interpreted in the light of clear passages.’⁷⁵

With its bizarre, apocalyptic imagery, Revelation is notoriously one of the *most* obscure books of the Bible. As Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart explain, ‘most of us in the church today hardly know what to make of it... no one should approach Revelation without a proper degree of humility!’⁷⁶ If anything, therefore, the meaning of Revelation should be illuminated by the clearer passage in Matthew 25, and not the other way around. And as has been demonstrated already, that text is better support for conditionalism than for the traditional view.

71 Peterson, ‘The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism’, 193; emphasis added.

72 Ibid., 197.

73 Ibid., 198.

74 R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, rev. edn (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 51; emphasis added.

75 McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 170.

76 Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth*, 4th edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 258–259.

But even taken on their own, Revelation 14:9–11 and 20:10–15 prove upon closer examination to be more consistent with conditionalism—if one accounts for Revelation’s genre as *apocalyptic* prophecy.⁷⁷ ‘Distinctive of apocalyptic’, explain McCartney and Clayton, ‘are its peculiar forms of symbolism.’⁷⁸ As Fee and Stuart put it, ‘the “stuff” of apocalyptic is presented in the form of visions and dreams, and its language is cryptic ... and symbolic.’⁷⁹ This does not mean that the meaning behind the symbolism is hopelessly lost to us, or that it can be dismissed, but it does mean interpreters must exercise great caution and apply sound hermeneutical principles.

Of utmost hermeneutical importance is Revelation’s extreme reliance upon Old Testament images and themes. As Fee and Stuart explain, ‘The taproot of apocalyptic is the Old Testament prophetic literature, especially as it is found in Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and parts of Isaiah.’⁸⁰ In Richard Bauckham’s words, ‘Revelation is saturated with verbal allusions to the Old Testament’. And as he goes on to explain, ‘These [allusions to the Old Testament] are not incidental but *essential* to the way meaning is conveyed. Without noticing some of the key allusions, little if anything of the meaning of the images will be understood.’⁸¹ So McCartney and Clayton encourage interpreters to examine Revelation’s symbols in light of ‘the connections that they had in previous written parts of the Bible.’⁸² Osborne concurs, saying, ‘In moving from the symbol to the reality it envisions, the reader should seek first the biblical ... background behind such symbols and then use this to interpret later allusions’. As an example he offers ‘the four beasts of Daniel 7 [which] stand for the world empires and their leaders. The use of the beasts in Revelation 13 builds on Daniel 7 and should be interpreted accordingly’.⁸³

Fudge follows suit in his hermeneutic, interpreting Revelation in the light of the Old Testament images and themes upon which it draws. Revelation 14:9–11 depicts beast-worshippers drinking the strongest measure of God’s wrath in fire and sulfur, smoke rising from their restless torment forever and ever. Fudge cites Old Testament texts like Obadiah 16 and Jeremiah 25:27 as evidence that drinking the fullest measure of God’s wrath results in death.⁸⁴ As evidence that ‘burning sulfur signifies extinction, destruction, eradication, extermination and annihilation’, he cites the fire and sulfur that rains down upon Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, from whose remains smoke rises the next morning, as well as the smoke that rises forever and ever from the remains of Edom in Isaiah 34:10.⁸⁵ He

77 Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 6.

78 McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 240.

79 Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth*, 260.

80 *Ibid.*

81 Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 18; emphasis added.

82 McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 241.

83 Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 284.

84 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 295–296.

85 *Ibid.*, 296–298.

points out that even elsewhere in Revelation itself, the imagery is used in this way: the harlot Mystery Babylon drinks the wine of God's wrath in 16:19 and 18:6; she is tormented in fire in 18:7, 10, and 15; smoke rises from her forever in 19:3; but the interpreting angel tells John in 18:21 that this imagery symbolizes the total destruction of the city represented by the harlot.⁸⁶

In the face of all of this, Peterson makes the bizarre claim that 'John's statements in Revelation 14:9–11 are very difficult for conditionalist interpreters to handle', and says Fudge 'never explained the verses at hand'.⁸⁷ In reality, after the aforementioned survey, Fudge concludes that the passage symbolizes 'a judgment culminating in absolute extinction ... [and] a silent wasteland devoid of inhabitant', smoke rising as 'a continuing reminder of God's just judgment'.⁸⁸

As for Revelation 20:10–15, Fudge notes that death and Hades are thrown into the same lake of fire into which the devil, beast, false prophet, and risen lost are thrown (v. 14), and cites Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:26 that 'The last enemy to be destroyed is death' as evidence that the imagery means death itself will be annihilated.⁸⁹ Indeed, John says in Revelation 21:4, ὁ θάνατος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι—'death shall be no more'. If the imagery is to be treated consistently, the devil, beast, false prophet, and risen lost must be annihilated as well. When all of God's enemies have been destroyed and those who remain will never die, death will have been destroyed.

This is why, Fudge notes, in Revelation 20:14 and 21:8 John and God *interpret* the lake of fire as symbolizing the 'second death', meaning death is the clearer reality symbolized by the perplexing image.⁹⁰ This is how interpretation works in Scripture: When an interpretation of dreams and visions is offered, it clarifies the meaning hidden in the otherwise cryptic imagery. Were this not the case, what was meant by the dreams of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar would be lost to them and to modern readers. Joseph says the seven cows in Pharaoh's dream 'are seven years' (Gen. 41:26); Daniel says the tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream 'is you, O king' (Dan. 4:20–22). John and God follow in this interpretive tradition, saying Revelation's lake of fire 'is the second death'. The lake of fire, then, symbolizes that the resurrected lost will literally die a second time. But as Fudge notes, 'Traditionalist authors always read the equation the other direction', taking torment in the lake of fire literally and 'second death' as metaphor.⁹¹

Contrary to Peterson's claim, then, that Fudge ignores these two of the big three, Fudge tackles them head on, applying sound hermeneutical principles, informed by Revelation's genre, *and* demonstrates that they teach conditionalism, and not the traditional view of hell.

86 *Ibid.*, 296, 299.

87 Peterson, 'The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism', 200.

88 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 300–301.

89 *Ibid.*, 305.

90 *Ibid.*, 306.

91 *Ibid.*

VI. The Nature of Hell

In fact, these two texts in Revelation constitute part of the third leg of the stool that is conditionalism's seat of doctrine: texts—of which there are dozens—indicating that what will happen in hell is that the lost will die, perish, and be destroyed. This plank in the case for conditionalism is the only one that typically receives attention from apologists for the traditional view, and their rebuttal is usually selective and insufficient. Peterson's is no exception.

From the 30-page chapter in which Fudge argues that the Old Testament promises final destruction for the unsaved, Peterson chooses to rebut Fudge's treatment of just two texts: the account of Noah's flood, and that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Peterson dismisses these on the grounds that they were historical and earthly, rather than eschatological, and did not result in anyone's cessation of existence.⁹² What goes strangely unmentioned by Peterson is Fudge's note in this very chapter that the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is cited in Jude 7 and 2 Peter 2:6 as an example of final punishment.⁹³ The meaning of Peter's words, in particular, seems unmistakable: 'by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes [God] condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly'. And in the next chapter, Peter likewise compares those who perished in Noah's flood to the future destruction of the lost (2 Peter 3:5–7).

Of course the judgments of the antediluvian population and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah were historical and earthly, but they are offered by the New Testament as examples of what final punishment looks like. And assuming the souls of those people lived on after their deaths, Jesus indicates in Matthew 10:28 that the souls of the wicked will be destroyed with their bodies in hell, using the Greek ἀπόλλυμι in the active voice to describe what one personal agent does to another, a use of the word that consistently means something like 'slay' or 'kill' in the synoptic gospels.⁹⁴

Later Peterson critiques Fudge's treatment of Mark 9:48, saying he essentially avoids Jesus's statement that in Gehenna 'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched'.⁹⁵ Peterson appears to be familiar only with Fudge's treatment of this text in a section devoted to Matthew 18, but Fudge had, in fact, addressed this text in his earlier treatment of Isaiah 66:24, which Jesus quotes in Mark 9:48.⁹⁶ There Fudge correctly notes that the hosts of the worms and fire are the *corpses* of God's slain enemies, not tormented living people. This lands the text squarely in conditionalism's favor.

Failing to justify his own belief that Jesus transforms Isaiah's scene of corpses into one of living immortals in torment, Peterson then accuses Fudge of failing

92 Peterson, 'The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism', 193–195.

93 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 100.

94 David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 315.

95 Peterson, 'The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism', 200–201.

96 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 111.

to explain why the worm is said not to die, and the fire not quenched. 'Would not the worm die when it had consumed its host?' he rhetorically asks, insisting also that 'not quenched' and 'consuming' are mutually exclusive.⁹⁷ In fact, Fudge had demonstrated in his treatment of Isaiah that 'Because this fire is "not quenched" or extinguished, it completely consumes what is put in it', citing Ezekiel 20:47–48 and Amos 5:5–6 as examples.⁹⁸ He also cites Matthew 3:12, in which 'unquenchable fire' is said to 'burn up' (NAS) chaff, the Greek *κατακαίω* meaning 'to burn something up, to reduce to ashes'.⁹⁹ To 'quench', after all, means to 'put out', and a fire no one can put out consumes completely. As this fire's parallel, the undying worm is a maggot which cannot be prevented by death from fully consuming its meal. In the similar picture in Jeremiah 7:32–33 it is fear which will not prevent scavengers from completely devouring carrion. There God says Gehenna will become known as 'the Valley of Slaughter ... And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth, and none will frighten them away'.

Traditionalists sometimes treat the intertestamental literature as more determinative of the New Testament's meaning than Old Testament texts like Isaiah 66:24, arguing, as Robert Morey does, that this literature reflects 'the general belief of the Jews that eternal [torment] awaited the wicked'.¹⁰⁰ Fudge admits that some intertestamental literature does indeed reflect such a view.¹⁰¹ He observes, for example, how Isaiah 66:24's scene of corpses is reinterpreted in the apocryphal book of Judith's picture of everlasting torment.¹⁰² But Fudge rightly applies the *analogia fidei*, insisting, 'A proper evangelical view of Scripture would seem to require that we give the Old Testament precedence over any extrabiblical materials as the proper background for viewing and understanding the New Testament'.¹⁰³ E. Earle Ellis agrees, adding that 'neither the Qumran writings nor the Old Testament Apocrypha, nor the largely post-first-century Jewish apocalyptic and rabbinic writings are of central importance; they are neither appealed to nor (with one exception) cited by the New Testament'.¹⁰⁴ Significantly, in Mark 9:48 Jesus quotes Isaiah, not Judith's reinterpretation thereof, adding nothing to the original wording that would indicate he is repurposing Isaiah's scene of corpses being consumed by maggots and fire to teach instead that resurrected,

97 Peterson, 'The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism', 201.

98 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 112; emphasis added.

99 Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd edn, vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 178.

100 Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1984), 127.

101 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 123.

102 Ibid., 128–129.

103 Ibid., 122, n.12.

104 E. Earle Ellis, 'New Testament Teaching on Hell', in *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism*, ed. by Christopher M. Date, Gregory G. Stump, and Joshua W. Anderson (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 116–137 (124).

living people will be made immortal so as to endure torment forever.

Besides, as modern scholars increasingly recognize, there *was* no monolithic Jewish view of final punishment in Jesus's day. Ellis acknowledges that *some* intertestamental literature attests to the doctrine of eternal torment, but sees in it a significant stream of annihilationist thought as well.¹⁰⁵ The book of Sirach promises that God will 'destroy the adversary and wipe out the enemy' (36:7) who shall be 'consumed in the fiery wrath' (v. 9), and compares the fate of the wicked to the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah slain by fire (16:8).¹⁰⁶ Qumran scroll 4Q418 says truth-lovers 'exist for ever' (69:7) but 'all the foolish of heart will be annihilated, and the sons of iniquity will not be found any more' (v. 8).¹⁰⁷ The Qumran scroll known as the Community Rule warns of 'eternal damnation' and 'bitter weeping' but only '*until* their destruction, without there being a remnant or a survivor for them' (1QS 4:12–14).¹⁰⁸ David Instone-Brewer seemingly goes further than Fudge and Ellis, saying Jesus's generation 'were *all agreed* that [hell] was characterized by fire and darkness with pain of torment *and eventual destruction*'.¹⁰⁹

Thus consistent with this prominent stream of intertestamental Jewish thought are Jude's and Peter's references to the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah, the apocalyptic imagery of Revelation 14 and 20, Matthew 10:28, and Mark 9:48. They join dozens of others as the third leg of the stool that is conditionalism's seat of doctrine, teaching that in hell, the resurrected lost will die, perish, and be destroyed—rather than live forever.

VII. Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to avoid the mere proof-texting typically relied upon by advocates of the traditional view of hell, applying instead the interpretive principle of *sedes doctrinae*, basing my theological conclusions as a conditionalist on a broad seat of doctrine. In substantiating the stool's first leg, I refused to commit the fallacy of illegitimate totality transfer, instead employing the grammatical-historical method by examining the literary context of Romans 6:23 and John 3:16, which teach that the *telos* of the gospel is to rescue sinners from death to life. I substantiated the stool's second leg by citing texts which indicate that immortality is a gift God will grant only to the saved, and noting the existence of early Christian thinkers who agreed, thus letting tradition play its proper hermeneutical role. In substantiating the third leg of the stool, I cited texts indicating

105 *Ibid.*, 123.

106 Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 126–127.

107 *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition (Translations)*, ed. by Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1997–1998), 2:871.

108 *Ibid.*, 1:78; emphasis added.

109 David Instone-Brewer, 'Eternal Punishment in First-Century Jewish Thought', in *A Consuming Passion: Essays on Hell and Immortality in Honor of Edward Fudge*, ed. by Christopher M. Date and Ron Highfield (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 213–242 (242); emphasis added.

that in hell the lost will die, perish, and be destroyed, as did the wicked in the flood and in Sodom and Gomorrah, to which New Testament authors point back as examples of what will happen in hell. And whereas the obscure apocalyptic symbolism of Revelation is mistakenly used by traditionalists to illuminate the meaning of plainer texts elsewhere, I accounted for its genre in my hermeneutic, pointing out that its imagery comes from the Old Testament where it communicated death and destruction.

And this is essentially the hermeneutic Fudge uses, even if he does not use some of the vocabulary of hermeneutics I have used. Peterson's charge to the contrary notwithstanding, the case for conditionalism appears quite strong when examined in light of hermeneutic and interpretive methodology. By all biblical indications, the resurrected lost will not live immortal in hell forever, but will instead die there, and forever.

Abstract

A little over a decade after Edward Fudge invited critical readers of *The Fire That Consumes* to 'measure this work by every proper standard', Robert Peterson responded in a paper presented at the 1994 ETS Convention entitled 'The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism: The Theological Method of Edward Fudge'. In his paper Peterson alleges to 'have pointed out deficiencies in [Fudge's] methodological approach' and concludes that 'evaluated in terms of hermeneutics and theological method, [Fudge's] case appears to be weak'. This paper presents a case for conditional immortality and the annihilation of the finally impenitent, arguing that they—and not the traditional view—result from exegesis done according to accepted hermeneutical principles, responding to Peterson's critique along the way.