

*Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue.* By Edward William Fudge & Robert A. Peterson. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000, 228 pp., n. p. paper.

Two authors who have already contributed significant works on hell square off in a debate in this volume. Edward Fudge previously defended annihilationism (he prefers the term "conditionalism" for conditional immortality) in *The Fire That Consumes: The Biblical Case for Conditional Immortality* (Paternoster), whereas Robert Peterson supported the traditional view of hell in his *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Presbyterian & Reformed). Annihilationists argue that the wicked, after being raised from the dead, are destroyed by God's consuming fire and hence cease to exist. Traditionalists, on the other hand, maintain that those whom God punishes in hell suffer conscious torment forever. The format of the book is quite simple. After a brief introduction to the topic, each author defends his view, and then a rebuttal from the other author ensues.

The most important arguments supporting annihilationism are as follows. The judgments in the OT involve destruction and perishing. Nothing is said about torment that is permanent and conscious. The image of fire that is often used for the judgment signifies destruction, not that sinners will be punished forever. Many believers derive their concept that hell is everlasting punishment from the immortality of the soul, but says Fudge, that notion stems from Greek philosophy and is unbiblical. The word "destroy" (*apōleia, apollymi*) is often used in the scriptures for the future judgment, but this word indicates, says Fudge, that unbelievers will be destroyed in the sense that they will no longer exist. But how does annihilationism explain texts like Matt 25:46 which

speak of eternal punishment? The author argues that the punishment will last forever in the sense that those who are blotted out of existence will be gone forever. Fudge is unsure that Rev 14:9-11 even refers to future punishment, and argues that in any case the imagery in the verses should be interpreted in light of the OT to refer to destruction, not conscious torment. Similarly, he maintains that the verses about the punishment of the devil, the false prophet, and the beast (Rev 19:20; 20:7-10) cannot be used to support the traditional view, for the false prophet and beast may represent institutions rather than individuals, and we should interpret the lake of fire as involving annihilation.

Peterson defends the traditional view that hell involves everlasting conscious torment. He supports his view from eleven figures of church history, by appealing to ten crucial texts in the scriptures, and by presenting three arguments from systematic theology. Since this review is necessarily a brief one, I can only state that Peterson is far more convincing than Fudge. He rightly notes that a view that has been the consensus for church history and that embraces ecclesiastical traditions from Roman Catholic to Baptist must be clearly refuted before being rejected. Most significantly, Peterson demonstrates that Fudge's exegesis of crucial texts is faulty. As Peterson shows Fudge often departs from the context in explaining crucial verses, and he resorts to a method of word study that has been discredited. For space reasons I will mention three crucial texts adduced by Peterson to note the weakness of Fudge's exegesis: Matt 25:46; Rev 14:9-11 and Rev 19:20; 20:7-10. The parallel between eternal life and eternal punishment in Matt 25:46 only stands if one holds the traditional view. It strains the natural meaning of the text to see eternal life as the conscious enjoyment of eternal life forever, but eternal punishment to mean that unbelievers cease to exist forever. The parallel indicates that both refer to a

conscious state that lasts forever, and that one will enjoy either eternal bliss or eternal torment. The texts in Rev 14:9-11 and 19:20 and 20:7-10 are also crucial. The language of being tormented forever and the statement that there is "no rest day or night" in Rev 14:9-11 clearly refers to an everlasting hell. Similarly, Peterson notes that the eternal punishment of the devil (Rev 20:10) indicates that personal beings are subjected to an everlasting punishment. Peterson's argumentation is clear and forceful and is a model of sound exegesis.

It is astonishing that Fudge uses the main portion of his rebuttal to defend the notion that the soul is not immortal, for Peterson does not make this the cornerstone of his case, and argues that immortality is not native to human beings but granted to them by God. Fudge interacts only briefly with Peterson's exegesis, claiming that his previous study of the text has already demonstrated the credibility of his view. His failure to respond to Peterson's pointed exegetical arguments is a serious deficiency, and functions as confirming evidence of the cogency of Peterson's view. On the other hand, Peterson's rebuttal of Fudge is pointed and compelling, interacting specifically with arguments presented by the latter. Finally, Fudge consistently solves problems in NT texts by appealing to the OT. He fails to see that the historical judgments in the OT function as types of the eternal judgment to come.

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