

# Everlasting Torment: An Examination

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The following intends to examine the Orthodox understanding of *final* punishment. Called into question is whether or not the Bible teaches the unsaved will be punished with everlasting, conscious torment.

The points contended are:

- (1) The Biblical warrant for the teaching is lacking
- (2) The inherent Immortality of all men is not a scriptural teaching
- (3) The Bible teaches the Conditional Immortality of men, and
- (4) The Bible teaches the destruction and eternal extinction of sin, sinners, and evil.

(1) Aside from several texts (Matthew 25:41, 46; Mark 9:43, 48, Revelation 14:10,11 and 20:10) which appear to be the strongest in favor of the traditional understanding, there is very little else to support the teaching. In other words, the overwhelming bulk of the biblical language does not comport with ‘unending conscious torment.’ It would seem that a teaching as significant as the one in question ought to be supported explicitly and frequently, and that the preponderance of scripture would testify to it. However, this is not what is found, and the above texts cannot be made to do the work of supporting the entire doctrine. Further, upon examination of those texts, alternate interpretations are not only available, but are shown to be superior, conforming to the rest of the Bible’s imagery of death and destruction.

(2) No passage of scripture can be adduced that teaches man or any part of man, be it a spirit or soul, is fundamentally immortal. That is, no text can be cited that teaches all men must exist forever because they possess a natural immortality. The Immortality or the necessary Eternity of the Soul is foreign to the Bible.

(3) Conversely, all references to Immortality are toward God, Christ and His redeemed, as He conditionally bestows it upon them. God alone possesses immortality (1 Tim. 6:16),

Christ discloses and offers it through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10), God grants it to those who persistently seek it (Romans 2:7) and it is obtained at the resurrection (I Cor. 15: 50-55).

In addition, the uses of the phrase ‘eternal life,’ synonymous with ‘immortality,’ has as its referent only the righteous (e.g. John 3:16, 10:28, Rom. 5:21, 6:23, etc.); or that it is something to inherit and obtain (e.g. Matthew 19:16, Luke 10:25, etc.). Not a single time, therefore, are the unrighteous spoken of as living forever or being made immortal.

(4) Consequently, as only the redeemed will enjoy an endless life, the unrighteous will not. Their fate, in both Testaments, is clearly and frequently described with the words ‘death’ (Rom. 1:32, 6:23), ‘perish,’ (I Cor. 1:18, 2 Peter 3:9), ‘destruction,’ (1 Thess. 5:3, Phil. 3:19), and ‘consume’ (Hebrews 10:27). Along with variants like die, dying, perish, perishing, destroy, destroyed, burned up, etc. being the dominant and consistent words to describe the fate of the lost, the meaning becomes obvious; contrasting it with eternal life and immortality makes it unmistakable that the existence of the unsaved is temporary.

This is the apex of the New Testament that ‘there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain, for the old order of things have passed away’ as God ‘makes all things new,’ ‘sums up all things in Christ,’ ‘reconciles all things to himself’ and will be ‘all in all’ (cf. Rev. 21:4,5; Eph. 1:10, Col. 1:20; I Cor. 15:28).

What follows, as the examination of *final punishment* continues, is a detailed look at several well-known Biblical passages that are consistently brought forward as evidence for *eternal torment* (Matthew 10:28 is the exception). They are the most commonly cited and referenced verses that are supposed to teach the orthodox doctrine, and without them, traditional views of *Hell* could never be supported. Should they be found to teach a view opposed to endless torment, or not *conclusively* teach endless torment, it must of consequence be concluded that the Bible does not, in any place, teach that the unsaved will suffer infinite, conscious pain as a penalty for their sins.

Furthermore, I specifically intended to analyze these passages as far from a “technical” viewpoint as possible. I wanted to provide an interpretation that any person could come to

themselves using only the most common tools. In other words, I did not want the interpretations to be so nuanced and dependent upon scholars, that the reader could conclude that such an exegesis *must* require great and prolonged study; or that the Annihilationist interpretations can only be acquired after hours of specific studies of extra-biblical authors. As that would have invited suspicion, not to mention be completely unnecessary (the Bible is most simply read and understood in Conditionalist terms), I sought to interpret the passages with only the most common resources. Those included a Bible, a Concordance, a Bible Dictionary, a Lexicon and an Interlinear Bible – all of which can be accessed for free by the general public in a variety of places online if they did not already have them in a hard copy.

Finally, though not one of the stalwart Traditionalist passages, Matthew 10:28 was included for three reasons, (1) it was an exegesis specifically asked for in an Internet Forum on the topic of *final punishment*; (2) it offered the chance to briefly discuss the *Intermediate State* and provide the disclaimer that, though of interest, it is not the topic of this discussion; and (3) it is a strong proof-text for Conditionalists and provides a valuable insight as to what Jesus taught about *Gehenna*.

### **Matthew 10:28**

**“Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”**

This is a text that, perhaps, is often overlooked for what it is saying. First, as for what Jesus means by “soul,” there is debate. It seems more than probable he means some immaterial aspect of man. By contrasting it with the “body” he means to show that man consists of a material and immaterial part (cf. Genesis 2:7). As for the exact nature and function of that immaterial part the Bible does not specify, and as to whether there is a conscious existence between death and resurrection (the “intermediate state”), the Bible is not perfectly explicit here either. Though a powerful case can be made for ‘soul sleep,’ there are a few texts that seem to support the opposite. But that is another topic – our subject here is *final punishment*.

The passage, as it relates to final punishment is unambiguous in stating that the ‘soul,’ whatever it may be, is not indestructible or immortal. It can and will be destroyed in *Gebenna* (translated, “hell”). That is a fairly clear statement that the fate of the unrighteous is not eternal torment, but destruction. At face value the term commonly denotes concepts like, ‘abolish, obliterate, annihilate, raze, demolish, etc.’ If Jesus wanted to teach everlasting torment, he would have likely used different wording such as ‘fear Him who could torment body and soul in hell,’ but he does not say that. He uses the term ‘destroy’ and the burden of proof is on the side of the Orthodox to show that the term ‘destroy’ means ‘torment.’ Of course this cannot be done, because the Greek (*apolesai*) simply cannot be forced to mean that.

Further, contextually there is not the least possibility that ‘destroy’ would imply ‘torment.’ For ‘destroy’ is parallel to the word ‘kill’ and must have some resemblance to the killing of the body; that is, some similarity to *death*, otherwise the warning is utterly meaningless. Jesus’ whole point is that man cannot kill the *soul*, so don’t fear them, fear God who can - and not only *kill it, but destroy it*. The word ‘destroy’ is a stronger correspondence to ‘kill.’ God will completely and utterly kill the soul. That is the clearest and most coherent meaning of the admonition – an endless torment does not fit the context or the language, but makes nonsense of both.

Finally, some have actually objected that the text does not say God *will* destroy, only that he is *able* to destroy, and that he will not actually do so. There is little patience for these sorts of arguments and thankfully they are not prevalent. It is absurd, for what sense would it make to warn someone of a destruction that is not going to happen? Why tell them to fear God for being able to destroy their soul, when he is going to torment it endlessly? Jesus would have told them to fear God for *that* reason if it were true. But regardless, the rest of the Bible says God *will* destroy, consume with fire and put to death the sinner, so are we going to say God is not going to act on those threats either?

## Daniel 12:2

**“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.”**

It is the phrase ‘everlasting contempt’ that grabs the attention of the Traditionalist and from it they imagine support for their dogma in the Old Testament. The reasoning is that there will be a resurrection, with some rising to everlasting life and others rising to everlasting contempt, and these unrighteous ones must exist for them to experience the disgrace and contempt. The first problem however is to assume that those held in contempt must be conscious of it *forever*. Upon examination of the passage, it will be shown that there is no warrant for this assumption and that the best evidence would lend itself toward the opposite conclusion.

(1) It must be noted, not necessarily insisted upon, that this passage may refer only to a resurrection of the righteous and makes no mention of a resurrection for the unjust. Evidence for this is the word “many” and what they are awakening to – that is “everlasting life.” If *many* awake from out of the dust, then that does not refer to *all people*, and the sense of the passage can be understood to teach that the righteous rise to live eternally, while the others do not awake and remain dead to their everlasting shame. Further, the context lends support to this, appearing to emphasize the *delivering* of those ‘written in the book’ (v.1) and the ‘shining’ of the righteous (v.3), as well as Daniel’s own promise to receive his reward at the end of the age (v.13). Moreover, other similar references in the OT seem to mention only the resurrection of the righteous (see Isaiah 26:19, Ezekiel 37:12-14). But after all, there is no pressing need to persist with this interpretation and it can be understood that both classes of resurrection are spoken of.

(2) Assuming, then, that both the holy and the iniquitous are reported as rising in this text, the righteous rise to *everlasting life* meaning that the unjust when awoken will not rise to the same, but to the opposite – a *temporary life*. Now the overwhelming testimony of the Bible is that the ‘wages of sin is death,’ but it is not needed to be stated so explicitly when the end of a temporary life is not hard to figure out. So the unrighteous rise to *die*, and in accord with the symbolism of the Revelation and the ‘second death,’ they will rise to be judged,

disgracefully condemned to death a second time that will arouse only the *enduring* disdain of the redeemed.

(3) That the unrighteous are raised to undergo a shameful death is even more substantiated by the use of the word ‘contempt’ in the Hebrew. Literally meaning ‘abhorrence,’ it is the same word used in Isaiah 66:24 where the righteous look upon the corpses of the rebellious with *abhorrence* as fire and worms consume their dead bodies. These are the only two times this word is used in the OT and some significance should be granted to that fact when establishing a connotation. In Isaiah’s usage, the corpses of the wicked are viewed with lasting disgust, and in Daniel, given that they rise in order to die, the lasting contempt must refer to a similar thing.

(4) Moreover, a note should be made that the ‘contempt’ is coming from either the righteous or God (or both), and is not descriptive of any state of the wicked. The ‘everlasting contempt’ is the subjective experience of the righteous prompted by the shamefulness of their counterparts. The phrase can say nothing about the state of the unrighteous as to whether they are conscious or not, or for how long, given that both the dead and living can be the objects of contempt. Only ‘contempt for the dead,’ however, best suits the imagery and language of the Old Testament in general and this passage in particular. It is the *memory* of the dead that is *shamed, disgraced* and held in *contempt* – “Let the wicked be put to shame, let them be silent in Sheol” (Psalm 31:17, see Ezekiel 32:30, Isaiah 14:9-20, and Proverbs 10:7 for other examples of this common OT theme).

In addition, it is significant to recognize the fact that there is nothing in the context that suggests the wicked are being tormented. The phrase *everlasting contempt* is not defined or described as *everlasting torment*, which is an inexcusable oversight if it were true. If this *contempt*, however, is for the dead, the silence makes sense and is understandable. Because they will not rise to an enduring life, there is no place for a clarifying of their state since they are dead, and such a condition needs no explanation. A state of death was clearly understood and it was enough to mention that their execution and failure to attain immortality brings their memory only a lasting disdain.

(5) Certainly, much is made about the term ‘everlasting’ used in both clauses and that the ‘contempt’ must last as long as the ‘life’ as they are both described by the same word in the same context. That Hebrew word is *olam*. It is similar to the Greek word *aion*, that mostly denotes *forever, everlasting or age-lasting*. But it is quite indefinite and connotes more of a *long duration, endurance or permanence* and is translated by as many as twenty different expressions including, *old, ages, long ago, long time, ancient, always, perpetual, never, permanent*, etc. That being said, the connotation of *olam* is determined by context and the specific word being modified and does not necessarily communicate an absolute infinity. Like ‘forever’ in English and ‘aion’ in Greek it oftentimes means as long as possible, without mention of how, if or when it ends. In this context, one phrase, ‘everlasting life,’ communicates a lasting and permanent existence and the other phrase, ‘everlasting contempt,’ communicates a lasting and permanent contempt. Now, there are some angles in understanding this, (a) it can be read in an indefinite sense to mean a *lasting contempt* without specific mention of when it ends. The word does not demand an actual eternity, nor does the context demand the *contempt* must last literally as long as the *life*; (b) however, should the words be taken to mean that the *contempt* lasts as long as the *life*, it can be taken as a parallel to illustrate the opposing fates of the Godly and ungodly. The one goes on to live forever; the other is dead forever. That is, their death state is *everlasting* because they are held in *permanent contempt* and do not deserve to “shine brightly like the stars forever” (v.3); nor are they “to attain the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:11) because they are not “worthy” of it (see Luke 20:35,36).

(6) Similar language in the OT may help in determining the most accurate meaning of the phrase in question: *everlasting contempt*. In Psalm 78:66 retells how God placed on his enemies an “everlasting reproach.” Contextually, the phrase is found in this historical narrative retelling the history of Israel’s mistakes, judgments and restoration (see vv. 34-53 for example). The scorn of “everlasting reproach” took place, then, in time and depicts the denunciation of Zion’s enemies (v.68) – which is parallel to an indefinite rejection similar to the one experienced by the tribes of Joseph and Ephraim (v.67). Clearly, “everlasting reproach” bears the meaning of an indistinct and lasting reprimand, at most for as long as these enemies exist. That comparable language to “everlasting contempt” often bears this temporal sense can be seen in Jeremiah 23:40 where God denounces the people for following after false prophets and will have them endure “everlasting reproach” and

“everlasting humiliation” – their city and their memory will be disgraced and their shame not forgotten. Again this is not an eternal and infinite reproach upon Israel, but an indefinite and *lasting* one that will endure a long time until her restoration. As Joel predicts: “The LORD will be zealous for His land and will have pity on His people. The LORD will answer and say..., ‘Behold...I will never again make you a reproach among the nations’” (2:18,19). It is apparent that this “eternal reproach” has an end and that God intends to restore those undergoing it. Given these uses, the phrase *everlasting contempt* ought to be read as an expression of a *permanent disdain* lasting indefinitely, not as teaching a literal eternity of disgust.

(7) Whatever the *exact* meaning of the phrase is, however, the above discussion has done justice to the language and context. Should both states be insisted on as being *literally* the same duration, the parallel, as has been established, is between “life” and “death” and as both are forever, that is satisfactory. The Traditionalist, however, must do violence and injustice to the text. To gain support for their doctrine, they must (a) ignore the life/death parallel and generate a contrast between happiness and misery, though the text says nothing of this; (b) show that the ‘contempt’ is provoked by the wicked being *tormented* though there is no mention of this concept in the whole context; (c) show that the ‘contempt’ is *eternally* provoked by their torment, because although the contempt is everlasting, that does not mean that it is perpetuated by the *same* cause. Initial disgust can be provoked by their torment, and the disgust can be continued by witnessing their horrible death. Further (d), they must explain how the righteous will view and observe the agony and torment of human beings for all eternity in a New Creation. Where are they in relation to the unrighteous? And more problematic is (e) they have to conclude that the righteous, for all eternity, will experience feelings of disgust, abhorrence and contempt. How, though, can these be any part of the new heavens and new earth where there is no more sorrow, pain, or tears – where the old order of things was said to have passed away? How does the Traditionalist imagine that the righteous will watch a person be tormented for long periods of time without becoming horrified and miserable themselves? It is only the most sadistically ill people who do not experience *agony* when they view the *protracted agony of others*. Instead, like God, the redeemed can “take no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ezekiel 33:11, cf. 18:23, 32).

No interpretation that creates “righteous sadists” can be the true one, and all five points are insurmountable difficulties for the traditional dogma. When it cannot get beyond even the first assumption that contrasts *happiness and misery*, there is no point in attempting to resolve the further problems. And these are not only problems, but profound absurdities, that the Traditionalist must face when they deny the clear biblical parallel between *life* and *death*.

In conclusion, Daniel 12:2 does not teach endless torment for a variety of reasons, (1) it is not clear that the verse teaches a resurrection of the unjust; (2) if it does, the parallel is between *life* and *death*; (3) the parallel language of ‘everlasting’ is indefinite and regardless, descriptive of a life state and a death state; (4) there is no mention of *torment* or *any* experience of the wicked, and (5) such an interpretation leads only to senselessness and contradictions.

#### Matthew 25:41, 46

**“Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels’... These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”**

Traditional interpretations of the verse seize upon the two phrases ‘eternal fire’ and ‘eternal punishment’ as well as the association between the punishment and the reward. That is to say, if the righteous are rewarded with an everlasting life, the unrighteous must be punished with an equally long punishment.

In reply, five things, (1) much can be said concerning the Greek expression *kolasis aionios* (*punishment eternal*), including (a) how antiquity sometimes used it to describe a finite penalty between people, (b) how the word *aionios* can bear various meanings along with being indefinite, (c) how the gospel of Matthew was probably written in Hebrew with the word for “punishment” (*kolasis*) being a translation, (d) how different words instead of *punishment*, like “fire” or “judgment,” appear in different manuscripts, or (e) how the word *kolasis* might bear

the sense of *cutting off*, *abscission*, *chastise* or *restrain*. Indeed, there is much to say about these things, but it is sufficient to mention them only in passing to serve as a simple caution against taking a text as more apparent than it actually is. This is one of the strongest passages in the Traditionalist's arsenal yet it is not free of ambiguities, nor is it as plain as sometimes represented. However, with all of that said, the Conditionalist does *not* depend on these qualms or uncertainties to offer the best meaning, so the above discussions, though of import, can be bypassed for now. The received reading, then, is suitable, and under that assumption, it appears evident that the length of the *punishment* is as long as the length of the *life* – that is, forever. It is now simply a matter of what the phrase *everlasting punishment* might mean.

(2) It should first be mentioned that the word *kolasis* does *not* require the connotation of conscious suffering. New Testament and Septuagint (Greek OT) usage will show what the lexicons detail: that the word generically means *punishment*, *penalty*, or *correction*. Thus *kolasis* is broadly descriptive, and like our word *punishment*, does *not* specify the quality or *type* of penalty – we must inquire further and determine what the *nature* of this “eternal punishment” actually is. Initially note that Jesus does not use a word like ‘torment’ (*basanismos*) to define the punishment, which likely *would* have been used if it was what he wanted to communicate. Instead, note that the penalty is contrasted with *life*, and staying true to the parallelism would therefore make the punishment *death*. Such an understanding of *kolasis* is made certain as this association is expressly stated in more specific terms elsewhere: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him will not *perish*, but have *eternal life*. . . . For the wages of sin is *death*, but the gift of God is *eternal life*. . . .” (John 3:16; Romans 6:23). In addition, it is no surprise to frequently find *kolasis* in the Septuagint connected with *death* – natural enough as putting to death *is* a punishment (perhaps the most severe that can be inflicted). Moreover, the conclusion that the general word *punishment* specifically means *death* is founded by taking the language at its primary meaning – a person *must* die and come to an end *if* they do not live forever. Thus, it appears plain enough; Jesus is warning that the unrighteous will suffer a capital punishment of *death*.

(3) It is called an *eternal* punishment because, destroyed, the punished will cease to exist forever, never to live again. It is understood, then, not as an everlasting punishing, but as a one time punishment that will have everlasting consequences. Compare Hebrews 6:2 where the phrase ‘eternal judgment’ is found. God is not going to be judging for all eternity; rather he will make one judgment that will have permanent implications. Similarly, He will not be punishing for all eternity, but will punish once with *death*, and it will be final, permanent, irreversible and eternal.

(4) Concerning the phrase ‘eternal fire’ found in verse 41, it might have been difficult to interpret were it not for Jude 7 which tells us exactly what it means and how it was used by the biblical authors: “...*even as Sodom and Gomorrah...having...given themselves up to unclean desires and gone after strange flesh, have been made an example, undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.*” Jude states that Sodom and Gomorrah serve as an example of those who underwent the punishment of *eternal fire*. That punishment was a complete reduction to dust and rubble; a total annihilation and those cities do not exist anymore. The ‘eternal fire’ did not torment the cities, it eradicated them. They endured the punishment of a fire which consumes utterly with permanent results. Therefore, Jesus means to say, when he uses the phrase, ‘eternal fire,’ not a flame which will burn forever in order to torture the unsaved, rather, he means the unrighteous will be consumed and destroyed entirely by a fire that leaves nothing left for all eternity. As Hebrews phrases it, all that remains is a “...*terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries*” for “*God is a consuming fire*” (Hebrews 10:27, 12:29).

(5) Should any doubt remain as to what Jude is trying to communicate and what the phrase ‘eternal fire’ designates, one more passage should be examined: “...*He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter*” (2 Peter 2:6). This is a parallel passage to Jude 7 with the extra detail as to what ‘eternal fire’ does and what is meant by ‘destruction’ – *a reducing to ashes*. Now this punishment is set forth as an example to the ungodly, why? Why would a ‘reduction to ashes’ be given to the ungodly as an example if that is not what their fate was going to be? What sense would that make to give them an example of a fire that consumes when their real punishment would be a fire that torments? It would make no sense at all.

God gives the ungodly this example precisely because that is what will happen to the one that persists in wickedness. That is perhaps why the NIV translates the verse, “...*He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly.*”

#### **Mark 9:43-48**

**“...it is better for you to enter life crippled, than...to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire...where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’”**

(1) The Greek word here translated ‘hell’ is *Gehenna*. This is a reference to the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom which lay to the south of Jerusalem where it was commonly used as a garbage receptacle. Worms consumed decaying material, and fires burned to dispose of trash, carcasses, and all types of waste.

(2) The language of ‘worm’ and ‘fire’ comes directly from Isaiah 66:24, “*Then they will go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched; and they will be an abhorrence to all mankind.*” The image is one of dead bodies rotting, being consumed by worms and fire. Note those agents are not tormenting living people, they are destroying corpses.

(3) Jesus, once again, offers *life* as the reward, compelling us to interpret ‘going into Gehenna’ as a death sentence. It is not between alternatives of bliss or torment; it is, as biblically usual, ‘life’ and ‘death.’ It is better to lose an eye, or a hand, and still be living (9:43), than to go into ‘Gehenna’ where the entire body will be lost.

We further note that nothing in the passage would lead us to think Jesus is attempting to communicate images of torment. Gehenna was not a prison of torture it was a trash dump of putrefaction. A reference to Gehenna, then, would evoke images, not of pain, but of destruction and death.

In particular, *fire* in both testaments, I repeat, is a consistent and clear tool for consumption and especially so in this context of refuse and debris. Moreover, worms do not torture or inflict pain – that is senseless. To interpret it that way leads to the absurdities of there being immortal worms in hell that torture the living; in addition to making the Bible choose a *worm* as a means to communicate pain and agony. Such an idea is simply foolish; at variance with Biblical thought, the specific context, the very definition of the Greek word itself (*skolex*), and common sense.

The burden of proof, therefore, falls on the Orthodox again to show that ‘worm’ and ‘fire’ in this context are meant to connote ‘torment’ and not ‘consumption,’ and once again the history of Gehenna, the reference in Isaiah to ‘corpses,’ and the contrasting of life with death make this an impossibility.

(4) Doesn’t ‘unquenchable fire’ mean an eternally burning fire? No, this has to be read back into the language once everlasting torment has been assumed. The phrase means to communicate the *strength* of a blaze, not its *duration*. In other words, ‘unquenchable’ has nothing to do with how long the fire burns, but is used to qualify its sheer intensity. It is the hottest conceivable fire that will not and cannot be quenched while it does its job of burning to ashes.

This can be seen vividly in Matthew 3:12, “...*He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*” Can it be any plainer, then, what ‘unquenchable fire’ does and means to communicate? It would be nonsense to speak of this fire as being everlasting and tormenting. Fire, consumes, burns up, and reduces to ashes – it is a simple and clear concept. It does not ‘torment’ the chaff; it ‘burns up’ the chaff. And if it weren’t clear enough, Jesus in Matthew 13:40, speaking of final judgment in a parable says, “...*just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.*” Jesus compares the

sinner's fate with weeds being burned in a fire. Are we to conclude that whatever happens to weeds when they are gathered and burned with fire is *not* what is going to happen to sinners? The picture is unpleasant, but it is unmistakable – weeds are reduced to nothing by a fire, not preserved and tormented, and so shall it be at the end of the age for the wicked.

(5) Does 'their worm will not die' and 'the fire will not be quenched' mean these will be eternal? Quite simply, to say 'their worm will not die' or 'the fire will not be quenched' does not necessitate a fire will always be burning and worms will always be living. Once again, this is language for the *effectiveness*, not the *time extension* of the worm and fire. It emphasizes the finality of the sentence, that there is no second chance, that the worms are not going to die and the fire is not going to be extinguished *before* it does its job reducing the carcasses to nothing. This is verbiage to guarantee *death* and *total consumption* – succumbing to these agents is inevitable *precisely because* they are not going to expire or be quenched.

That is to say, there is not one ray of hope the worms will crawl away or the fire will blow out and preserve something of the body. Instead, the worms are going to feed and the fire is going to consume until there is nothing left of the corpse, and there is nothing that will impede these forces. Anything subjected to such effective destroyers cannot escape *complete destruction*. Thus, the wicked will not enjoy an honorable burial; they will lose their entire body in a grisly cremation, tossed as garbage into Gehenna. And that is Jesus' point – that it is better to lose an eye or a hand and *live*, then to die and have your entire body devoured by worms and fire.

Moreover, when used elsewhere in scripture, this exact language bears the sense of destruction: "Say to the southern forest: '...I am about to set fire to you, and it will consume all your trees...the blazing flame will not be quenched, and every face from south to north will be scorched by it.'" (Ezekiel 20:47-48). Also, "...I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses" (Jeremiah 17:27; see also Jeremiah 7:20, Isaiah 1:31 and Luke 3:17). Notice that the *blazing flame* and *unquenchable fire* are for consuming and scorching, and that it would be meaningless to assert that the southern forest or the fortresses will be eternally ablaze *after* being burnt up. The consistent usage and meaning of these phrases describe the strength and quality of the fire for temporal judgments. Never once do they refer to an

endless duration of the flame, and never do they ascribe a *tormenting* purpose for this fire. Instead, its function is to consume and destroy.

(6) Lastly, an inconsistency must be noted in the use of language by the Traditionalist. When they say the “worm will not *die*,” clearly they mean to indicate the worm will not “cease to be” taking the word *die* at its natural and primary meaning. However when it is said that the sinner will “die,” they do *not* mean “cease to be.” Instead by the same word they want to communicate two entirely different meanings, in this case, the sinner will suffer an endless existence in torment taking on an unwarranted, figurative sense of the word. Such a sense is without justification on three grounds, (a) there is no reason to attach a figurative sense to the word *die* and ignore its primary meaning in clear prose, (b) a metaphorical sense must have some association to the primary sense – in this case, there is not the slightest relationship between the primary sense of *die* and its figurative sense of ‘endless life in torment,’ and (c) there is no lexical or linguistic evidence to suggest that *die* can even support a metaphorical meaning of ‘endless torment.’ Such a loose and arbitrary imposition on the word is a gross error without equivalent.

## 2 Thessalonians 1:9

**“These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power...”**

In understanding this particular passage, the first thing to note is that many of the common English translations, including the NIV and the NASB (quoted here), have taken liberties with the original, giving some interpretation. Specifically, the *comma* and the word *away*, both following the word ‘destruction’ are not a part of the original Greek. The text reads roughly as follows: *who will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the face of the lord and from the glory of his strength*. Adding the comma causes the reader to pause as though the ‘eternal destruction’ clause is complete by itself not dependent on what follows. Adding the ‘away’ qualifies the ‘eternal destruction’ as being a penalty of *separation* (the NIV is more pronounced adding ‘and shut out’), and the word ‘presence’ completes the thought that this is separation away from Christ. This is of course the preferred rendering for the Traditionalist as it is best able

to accommodate the consciousness and existence of the punished. If they are *separated* from God then they still exist, albeit in a *state of endless ruin*.

The phrase however can bear an entirely different meaning; namely that the destruction is not *away* from Christ, but that it *comes* from Christ. He is the *source* of the destruction. That is the preferred rendering for the Conditionalist for equally obvious reasons. Now which is the most likely meaning - Separation *away* from the Lord, or destruction *by* the Lord? The Greek construction is *apo prosopou tou kurion* – *from face of the Lord* and is able to support both, the appropriate one determined by context. The task then is to acquire the intended and best meaning.

(1) I am aware of only one significant argument in favor of making this verse teach that the punishment spoken of involves the sense of ‘separation.’ It is said that the Old Testament text (Isaiah 2:10,19,21, LXX) which Paul is using, utilizes this sense, therefore Paul is using this sense as well. Granting Paul is even quoting Isaiah here, as most seem to allow, there are a number of problems with this conclusion. (a) We cannot assume Paul is using the same sense of the passage, when Paul does not even use the exact same phrase. He alters it by dropping the word *phobos* (fear) and replacing it with the word *prosopon* (face). This changes the meaning of the phrase and thus the original sense no longer applies. (b) Recall that it is the *context* that determines the meaning of the phrase in question, not the phrase itself. Paul does *not employ the context* of Isaiah’s passage, only the thrice repeated refrain. Therefore, since Paul removes the phrase from its context to a new one, we cannot build an argument from the original. (c) Being away from the Lord is *exactly* what the unrighteous want in Isaiah’s context (cf. Revelation 6:16). Being separated from God is the *escape* from punishment; it is not the punishment itself. They are hiding from God’s terror in fear of being discovered and destroyed. That being the case, Paul would never have employed that sense into his passage. Instead Paul is saying to the unrighteous that they will *not escape*, they will *not be hidden*, and they will *not be away from* the destructive presence of God. This argument, then, must fail to help the Traditionalist.

(2) The truest test, however, is to submit both meanings to the context of 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10, and see which fits better. Should one fail to make any sense, or as much sense as the alternate, we can be certain what Paul intended to say.

- **Verse 6** – God is Just to repay with affliction those that afflict Christians indicating that the type of punishment is positive and active, that is, it is not a passive banishment or a negative exclusion. Afflictors are not going to be put in the corner for a timeout; they are going to be swatted (to continue the analogy). They are going to receive an affliction *from* God.
- **Verse 7** – Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire. What would fire signify if Paul wishes to teach sinners will be shut out from God? It appears as only an effect for show, that is to say, an unessential appendage. The fire, however, is a useful motif here - it is for *consuming* the enemies of God (cf. Heb. 10:27). This fire theme is not new and it is clear what the bible means by it – to consume, burn up, destroy, reduce to ashes, melt, kill, etc. *For behold, YWHW will come in fire...will execute judgment by fire...and those slain by YWHW will be many* (Isaiah 66:15,16). *The present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men* (2 Peter 3:7).
- **Verse 8** – The Lord will *deal out* retribution. That is to say, retribution and destruction are coming *from* God. He is giving out punitive vengeance and to say this destruction is a shutting out from God's presence misses the imagery entirely – it is a violent and wrathful event dealt out by Christ.
- **Verse 9** – the penalty is destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his strength. If the translators were consistent they would have supplied the words 'shut out' to the second clause, and it should read: *shut out from (apo) the face of the Lord and shut out from (apo) the glory of his strength*. The same Greek preposition is used in both. Now, which is more logical? Option 1: Paul wanted to communicate a fiery banishment to a state of ruin *shut out from* Christ's person and *shut out from* Christ's glorious strength. Option 2: Paul wanted to communicate a fiery punishment of destruction that comes *from* Christ's person and *from* his glorious strength. The first option simply fails to account for how Paul could conceive that being deprived of Jesus' strength would be a punishment. It borders

on absurd to imagine the wages of sin is to be shut out from Jesus' might. What does the sinner care about that? And of all the qualities he could have chosen to make the sinner feel like they were going to be missing something valuable, why did Paul choose 'strength'? Love, joy, beauty or peace, for example, would have made more sense and been more appropriate. As it stands however, 'strength' ('strength' appears to be a superior translation to 'power' for this word, cf. Mark 12:30) is the word chosen and it does not take a genius to figure out why. Paul means that Christ in blazing fire, with mighty angels, dealing out retribution, will destroy sinners using his strength.

- **Verse 10** – this is to happen on the day of his return and appearance to be marveled at and glorified. What are the saints marveling at? What are they respecting Christ for? It is his powerful ability to destroy the enemy. “Whoa, Christ just sent that chap away from his presence! Did you just see how Jesus banished that woman away from his strength? What a marvelous display of power!” Utter nonsense. Christ is marveled at because of his ‘glorious strength’ to conquer his enemies. Further, note that this is an event happening *on the day* Christ returns. They will be destroyed at the time Christ returns. That is the natural reading of the text, *these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his power when he comes to be glorified...on that day*. There is just no possibility Paul means to say they will pay the penalty of an eternal state of ruin away from the presence and strength of Christ on that single day. How can they pay an eternal penalty in one day? How is it possible to suffer an eternal destruction in limited time during the space of a single event? The only answer for this is that they are put to death and permanently destroyed, all of which happens on the day Christ returns – penalty paid in full. The Traditionalist’s explanation, however, demands that the sinner never actually fully pays the penalty, but begins to pay it on the day Christ returns and continues to pay forever afterward. The context, however, shows that they will pay all of it on the ‘day of the Lord.’
- **Chapter 2, Verse 8** – Ten verses later in the same context of Jesus’ return, Paul describes the slaying of the ‘lawless one.’ It is unmistakable that the destruction is coming from Christ’s being and presence – “The Lord will slay [him] with the

breath of his mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His presence.” If the above context did not already convince us that the destruction in verse 9 is originating from Christ, this verse adds incontrovertible support to that thesis. It would be unwarranted and unnecessary to assume Paul is describing two different types of destruction in the same context – especially when both are described similarly as from the ‘face,’ the ‘mouth,’ the ‘strength’ and his ‘presence.’

Both meanings have now been submitted to the test of context and it is obvious that one is far superior to the other. The ‘separation’ understanding is incoherent, cannot account for the ‘strength’ of Christ and makes little sense of the apocalyptic imagery leading up to the phrase in question. The ‘origin’ understanding makes perfect sense of the images, bolsters the meaning of Christ’s strength and fits the context completely.

(3) A similar passage in 1 Thessalonians buttresses the above conclusions: “...*the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, ‘peace and safety’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape*” (5:2,3). The same word in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 for “destruction,” *olethros*, is used here. Along with the ‘day of the Lord’ it is obvious that we have the *same* destruction spoken of in both places. This verse tells us that the destruction will overtake them suddenly and by surprise, like a thief in the night, and like a woman seized by labor pains. Notice, it is the destruction that surprises them, showing once again that Paul understood the destruction to be a single event, not an endless state. But this is not a new concept as Jesus made the same, exact points, “But of that day and hour no one knows...if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert...” (Matthew 24:36,43). Moreover, “the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah...they were eating and drinking...and they did not know until the flood came and took them all away; so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (24:37-39). Luke recounts the same event with Noah and Lot, “...the flood came and destroyed them all...on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed” (see Luke 17:26-30). Extermination came as a surprise to the flood victims and surprise destruction is promised again. So in summary: a violent, fatal, sudden, and surprising destruction is coming on the

day of the Lord *from* the Lord. A state of ruin away from the presence of Christ is neither violent, surprising, sudden nor fatal. It bears no resemblance whatsoever to the deluge and destruction of Sodom, and therefore cannot be what Paul had in mind. Once again, it is destruction *from* the person of Christ that fits the criteria.

(4) At the risk of overkill, in an attempt to cover all bases, still more evidence ought to be presented in solidifying an ‘origin’ understanding of the phrase. These can be viewed as more or less minor. (a) Paul is fond of using the word *apo* in the sense of ‘coming from,’ beginning each of his letters with a characteristic blessing that sounds something like, ‘Grace to you and peace *from* God our Father’ (Romans 1:7, cf. I Cor. 1:3, etc.). That similar sense is used in numerous other places including Colossians 3:24 and Philippians 1:28 – this last text could also be read to show that not only the salvation, but the destruction is *from* God, but there is no need to press the point. This proves nothing conclusively, only that Paul habitually used the preposition in the sense of ‘origin.’ Moreover, (b) Paul had a number of better, more precise ways of denoting a separation. He could have used the language of Ephesians 2:12, Romans 8:35,39, Romans 9:3, Acts 15:39, or Hebrews 7:26. This last passage in Hebrews highlights a Greek construction that Paul could have employed to unmistakably teach a separation. It is *kechorismenos apo* – ‘having been separated from.’ Paul does not use such wording in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 although it was available and he used similar language in other parts of his epistles. Is there an explanation? (c) Although Acts 3:19 contains the identical phrase - “Repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come *from the face of the Lord,*” and the sense of origin is unmistakable, it is made certain by use of the words ‘may come,’ and therefore we cannot use this as a conclusive proof. Each time the similar phrase is used throughout the Bible, a verb is attached to qualify (depart, go, went, hide, fall, flee, came in, came out, brought out, etc.). What makes the phrase in Thessalonians ambiguous is that no such clear verb is available to help. There is even the possibility that the verb means *to incur*, in which case the sense of incurring a penalty from the Lord is unavoidable. Should we stick with *pay*, then the sense that they will be paying a penalty that was received from the Lord is allowable as well. Lastly, (d) the Old Testament sets the precedence for a destruction coming from God’s person. It is a repeated theme and sounds like this, *and fire came out from the presence of the LORD* (Leviticus 10:2, cf. 9:24), *Fire also came forth from the LORD* (Numbers 16:35), *the fire of*

*God came down from heaven and consumed* (2 Kings 1:12). The most significant passages, however, are the following because they have to do with the event Paul is referencing. *Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty* (Joel 1:15) and *Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty...Behold the day of the LORD is coming...to make the land a desolation and He will exterminate sinners from it* (Isaiah 13:6,9). There can be very little doubt this is what Paul has in mind as he describes the day of Christ coming with fire and angels to deliver destruction. Notice that the destruction comes *from* the Almighty and it will exterminate sinners. I find this to be substantial in bearing upon the question at hand.

(5) The case, then, has been made to show that the phrasing is best understood as a destruction originating from God and not defined as a separation from God. It alone fits the context of the surrounding verses as well as being in harmony with the rest of the Bible on this theme. But it is still left to assume, for argument, the sense of separation and determine if an annihilationist conclusion is impossible. That is, assuming the sense of separation is given to the text, does it guarantee a Traditionalist's interpretation? *These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord.* At face value, it is not apparent that this is so. The text can still be understood to mean that the unrighteous suffer a destruction that removes them from God's presence, that is, their extermination deprives them of it. Which shows that there are still a few assumptions made at this point by the Traditionalist, (a) 'eternal destruction' means a 'state of endless ruin,' (b) that 'state' is a conscious existence, and (c) that is *not* the totality of the punishment. All three assumptions are unwarranted, and assumption (b) never gets off the ground because premise (a) is not provable. Here are the problems: (a) there are no legitimate grounds for defining 'eternal destruction' as a 'state of endless ruin' as will be shown a little later. (b) Assuming, it could be understood as that, we still cannot conclude it is therefore a *conscious* state. Certainly, if one suffers eternal ruin and is shut out from the presence of Christ, it cannot prove they have any conscious presence elsewhere, anymore than they would have a presence or consciousness somewhere after being killed. Consider the following biblical texts that highlight this: Genesis 6:7, 7:4; 1 Samuel 20:15; Amos 9:8; Zephaniah 1:2,3 and especially Exodus 32:12 and Jeremiah 28:16. In no case of this separation from the land's or earth's face are we to assume that they will have a presence elsewhere for the simple fact that they

are dead. Why then should we assume that a person suffering eternal ruin, away from the presence of the Lord, is alive and present somewhere else? An eternal ruin can just as easily refer to them being completely dead and destroyed; much like a demolished city.

Moreover and technically speaking, to be out of God's presence is to be nowhere since you cannot be absent from an all-present Spirit, for "in him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17:28). Aware of this, the Traditionalist must respond that to be away from the presence of the Lord means to be away from Christ, not God per se. Or the phrase is anthropomorphic and means out of friendship and good relations with God – away from his comforting joy and love. But this solves nothing, just adds a fourth assumption, itself in need of proof.

Furthermore, (c) the Traditionalist has to conclude that Paul did not describe the whole penalty for sinners, using 'eternal destruction' of the unrighteous in only a deprivative sense – that is, they will exist in a state of ruin away from Christ forever. But what does this even mean? Where are the positive terms that describe the actual punishment? What does a state of ruin imply and what is threatening about a punishment away from the presence of the Lord? How will God afflict? Will there be physical torment? How much and how often? Will bodies be ruined, and what does that mean? How will sinners be ruined exactly? All these questions are left unanswered and what is worse, unaddressed by Paul as if he cared or knew nothing about it. He is made to teach the actual punishment in only passive terms of deprivation, leaving out the most important part - the part about what an eternity of affliction and retribution means. He does not bother to even begin to specify what this 'state of endless ruin' even looks like. It seems Jonathan Edwards knew more about this place than Paul did, or at least was more willing to tell us about it. Thus, the Traditionalist's interpretation lacks all cogency, heaping nonsense on top of absurdities and every attempt at an explanation only produces more puzzles. The entire scheme is a tangled mass of epicycles and thoroughly *ad hoc* – and that is even *after* their sense of 'separation' is granted gratuitously!

(6) At last, an examination of the phrase *eternal destruction* is due. The Greek word, as noted earlier is *olethros*, and from all of its Biblical uses, the best English equivalent appears to be 'destruction,' and the sense of 'ruin' is allowable in so far as it is synonymous with

‘destruction.’ No living or suitably functioning state is denoted by this word – in that anything ruined cannot exist or be useful any longer.

- (i) It is this latter sense that the Traditionalists are quick to exploit. They reason as follows: destroy does not have to mean the termination of existence, but can mean *the loss of use and function*. They point to examples of the ruined and ‘burst wineskins,’ the ‘wasted ointment’ and the ‘lost coin’ to prove that to be lost or ruined does not mean to be non-existent. But this will not do, for it ignores the relationship between function and existence. Whatever ceases to function, sooner or later ceases to exist – the former causing the latter. The ‘wasted ointment’ is destroyed, spilled onto the ground, serving no purpose, soon to dry up and be gone forever. The ruined wineskins are destroyed and unable to function any longer. They are trash and will soon be burnt to molecules or decay naturally into the same. In either case, the wineskins, having been ruined, will be non-existent. The same holds for a ‘lost son’ and a ‘lost coin.’ Both are absent and missing, and both are *as if* they did not exist. Should the boy remain lost, he will die and *literally* exist no more. Should the coin never be found, it will be useless all the way to its own extinction (although much slower than a man). The point then is that, whether organic or inorganic, slowly or quickly, anything said to be lost, ruined or wasted, is to describe the cause for its fate of extinction.
- (ii) This highlights the second problem with the Traditionalist’s reasoning. It employs a secondary sense of a word without reference to its primary meaning. That is to say, without the essential meaning of ‘destroy’ in place, the subordinate meaning of ‘useless’ loses its proper footing. As ‘destroy’ primarily communicates something akin to *demolish, damage beyond repair, reduce to useless remains, annihilate, kill, to put an end to, extinguish*, etc., every usage of that word must bear some semblance to and dependence on this meaning. That is why to ‘ruin’ something always has as its goal, an object’s *extinction*. You do not ‘ruin’ something in order to perpetuate its existence and that is why anything spoken of as ‘ruined,’ connected to its root meaning of ‘destroyed,’ is understood to be an ‘extinction.’ So in the case where a ruinous cause does not describe the final effect, we recognize its extinction as implied and inherent. Therefore, the

Traditionalists are completely outside their semantic rights to assume that an object made useless and ruined is to persist forever.

- (iii) Without this linguistic foundation, a third problem arises. The Traditionalist cannot account for all the other Biblical uses of ‘destroy’ in precisely the manner the Annihilationist contends for. The Traditionalist, then, who will not properly define the Greek word *apollumi* as a destruction, ruining or loss ‘to extinction’ but as something connoting a ruining to a ‘useless and lower quality of existence,’ has to explain the following: Matthew 2:13; 5:29, Mark 3:6; 9:41; 11:18; 12:9, Luke 17:27, 29, 21:18, John 10:10, 1 Corinthians 1:19; 15:18, Hebrews 1:10-11, James 1:10-11, and Revelation 18:14. Traditionalism is left, then, with most usages of the word clearly meaning ‘destruction to extinction,’ and a few usages where it does not, and they haven’t the slightest idea how to reconcile them. This is so because they have ignored basic laws of linguistics, as noted in the above points. This anarchy allows them to define a word in whatever way they need to in order to make it conform to a dogma. So being *destroyed* just means ‘ruined without destruction;’ *perish* means to be in a state of perishing, and to die means existing in a state separate from God.
- (iv) And so here we reiterate the greatest problem with these techniques for the Traditionalist, and that is the language of the Bible is never allowed to describe the actual punishment of the unrighteous. As already noted above, they are happy to leave the individual in a state of ruin, silent on the exact nature of the punishment. They cannot squeeze their meaning of ‘torment’ into the word ‘destruction’ so they must leave it to mean anything and nothing at all.
- (v) That being established, when *olethros* is examined in its other uses in the Bible, a *destruction or ruining, unto extinction* is the sense that is supported. The noun is used four times in the NT and the verb form only once.
  - a. 1 Corinthians 5:5 speaks of the incestuous sinner being handed over to Satan for the “...*destruction* of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” One interpretation is that Paul seeks to *damage* or *ruin* his flesh with an illness or some physical affliction, cf. Job 2:4-9, as a chastisement so that his spirit (his life/being/soul) will be rescued on the Day of Judgment. Thus, Paul uses *olethros* here in the sense of a *ruining unto*

*death*, so that the sinner would repent. If he does not repent, the affliction will destroy his body completely and consequently his spirit will be destroyed, not being preserved or ‘saved.’ Paul reasons that it is better to damage the body in an effort to preserve the spirit, for the body is renewable in resurrection, but if the spirit is destroyed it is an irrecoverable and permanent loss. A second way to look at this verse is that Paul means to communicate a *destruction* of the *acts of the flesh*, in which case *olethros* carries the sense of *abolishing and exterminating* sinful behavior.

- b. 1 Thessalonians 5:3 is manifestly similar to the text in question and should carry significant weight. Paul reminds that the ‘day of the Lord’ will come like a ‘thief in the night’ and when the unredeemed are saying ‘peace and safety’ they will be overtaken and surprised by a sudden destruction and they will not escape it. Paul uses *olethros* here to communicate quite clearly a *destruction unto extinction*. Linked to the exact same descriptions of a ‘thief in the night’ and day of the Lord that Jesus mentions, this is the only conclusion. Jesus says in Matthew 24:36-44 and Luke 17:29-30 that this destruction will be just like the destruction of the Great Flood and of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- c. I Timothy 6:9 – Paul warns that coveting riches is a trap that produces foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. The word ‘ruin’ is the Greek word *olethros* here. In this context, *olethros* bears the sense of peril and wreckage; a life ‘pierced with many griefs’ (v.10). Connected to *destruction*, which bears the sense of *complete ruin*, Paul means to use *olethros* to describe the ruined life of someone who longs after and chases money (v.10). It distracts them, and in pursuit of it they wander from the faith destroying their lives. A life of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness (v.11) is dead and gone, and in its place is a wrecked and broken one that cannot ‘fight the good fight of faith’ and will not ‘take hold of eternal life’ (v.12).
- d. Hebrews 11:28, “By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them.” The verb ‘destroyed’ in English is *olothreuo* in Greek and is the verb form of the

word *olethros*. Recall that the firstborn in Egypt were struck dead by the “destroyer” (see Exodus 12:21-30), so that this use of *olethros* clearly means a *destruction unto extinction*.

- (vi) What then is the significance of the adjective *aionios* which is describing this *destruction*? In my estimation, the word *aionios* is best translated here as *permanent* and not *eternal*. Though near equivalents I think *permanent* better captures the sense of the word in various contexts. For example, in the second letter to the Corinthians, the things which are seen are *temporary* but things that are not seen are *permanent* (4:18). Further, Paul compares his current body to a temporary tent, but he does not worry knowing he has an eternal house in the heavens – the sense of *permanence* contrasted with transience is evident. Paul anticipates a permanent body from the heavens while possessing a temporary one now on Earth. That being said, 2 Thessalonians 1:9 appears to be a context more suitable to a translation of *permanent* rather than *eternal*, stressing the finality of the destruction as opposed to connoting an endless process of destroying. The sense then would be that sinners will *suffer a permanent destruction*.

But the point does not need to be pressed and the standard translation of ‘eternal destruction’ is adequate and can remain. It still carries the same meaning that they will be punished by Christ’s strength with a destruction that will be everlasting and irreversible. That is to say that an *eternal destruction* describes the permanent *consequences* of the destruction, not the duration of the destroying process. This sense is common when the word ‘eternal’ is paired with a ‘noun of action’ – for example, an *eternal salvation*, *eternal redemption* and *eternal judgment* (Hebrews 5:9, 6:2, 9:12); or an *eternal sin* (Mark 3:29), or an *eternal fire* (Jude 7). Neither the *salvation*, *redemption*, *judgment*, *sin* or *fire* are going to be eternally enduring actions, rather their results are what is meant as final and everlasting.

In conclusion, finding absolutely nothing about endless torment in all the writings of the foremost New Testament apostle, the Traditionalist obsesses over this passage as a beggar would for a crumb. They will not allow the clear and consistent message of Paul about ‘death’ and ‘perish’ to speak for itself; they must prey upon this text. Nor will they even

attempt to give a reason why Paul never mentions endless suffering or even the word ‘hell’ – this passage is good enough. The infatuation with this text makes a fool of Paul who, although educated, articulate and believing in endless torments, couldn’t better describe it except with the words ‘eternal destruction.’ That is not remotely reasonable, and until this error is admitted, Paul’s writings on future punishment will continue to embarrass and perplex defenders of endless torment.

## The Apocalypse

### **Revelation 14:11**

**“...the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image....”**

### **Revelation 20:10**

**“And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”**

It is significant that the Traditionalist must seek primary evidence for their doctrine, not in the plainest prose of scripture, but in the visions of Revelation. No other texts in the entire canon offer stronger support to the dogma than these, and none are as exploited. The frequency with which they are quoted in any orthodox defense of ‘eternal torment’ illustrates what has already been observed: the case is exceedingly fragile. But, as we will see, not even these two passages can burden the entire load they have been made to carry.

The Book of Revelation consists largely of ‘apocalyptic literature,’ and no interpretation would be legitimate without first considering this. The genre is characterized by symbolism, cryptograms, visions, poetry, hyperbole, figures of speech, and metaphors. In other words, very little in the book is meant to be taken perfectly literal as it is not a dispassionate, legal document using precise language. The genre exists as a tool by which an author through vivid imagery, to some degree covertly, can communicate lessons, encouragement, morals,

and general knowledge. As with *myth*, ‘apocalyptic’ storytelling seeks to achieve a similar end, wherein the particulars of a story are not objectively real, the moral or general message being passed on is the goal.

Consequently, the Revelation is one of, if not, *the* most difficult of all NT books to interpret because of its style and use of types. Caution should then be taken to interpret the passages in light of the clearer testimony of the Bible, and not the other way around. That is, if the rest of the Bible in precise language tells us the fate of the unrighteous is death and destruction, we ought to bring apocalyptic texts into harmony with the unambiguous majority. But depending so thoroughly on the hyperbolic language of the Revelation, the Traditionalist has ignored this rule, and such disregard must only testify to the scarcity of evidence the dogma has in its favor.

As for the context and purpose of the Apocalypse, it appears to be this: The encouraging of Christians in a time of severe persecution from Rome at the end of the first century. This is done by (a) the promise of rewards for overcoming and remaining faithful, (b) the certainty of God’s wrath against their opposition, (c) Christ’s ultimate victory over all enemies, and (d) the promise that this was soon to happen.

Given this brief overview of the function and genre of the Revelation we can begin an examination of the principle passages supposed to teach the doctrine of endless torment.

#### **Revelation 14:10,11**

**“...he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength...and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image....”**

This first passage is found in a vision of three angels delivering messages, where the final angel pronounces warning to the inhabitants of the earth that should they ‘*worship the beast and his image and receives his mark,*’ they will ‘*drink of the wine of God’s wrath.*’ And that they will

be ‘tormented’ in view of the Lamb, and that *‘the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever.’* This passage, though getting closer to the language of the Traditionalist still does not prove the common dogma of hell’s endless torments for a variety of reasons. We list them as:

(1) The passage has nothing to do with the final judgment, which is depicted later. There is no resurrection, no ‘white throne,’ hell is not mentioned, there is no reference to the lake of fire, and the punishment is executed on Earth at a point in time. In fact, the ‘wrath of God’ against those who ‘had the mark of the beast’ is portrayed in 16:1-21 with the ‘seven bowls of wrath,’ which, incidentally, are said to end God’s anger (see 15:1,8). The bowls are thus ‘poured out’ on mankind (resembling the plagues of Egypt), none of them describe postmortem torments, and they culminate in death as shown in two symbols, (a) crushed liked grapes into a bloody river (14:14-20), and (b) carcasses left as food for gluttonous birds (19:17-21). It is a picture of earthly judgment and punishment, not the torments of hell.

(2) Essentially, it is a symbolic vision not to be taken as an authentic situation – the details are given to paint a picture of divine retribution on those who ‘...poured out the blood of the saints and prophets...’ (16:6). More to the point, the symbols *cannot* be taken literally unless we are prepared to have people literally drinking cups of wrath, a lamb watching torment, unending smoke from bodies that are being consumed but never totally, a man sitting on a cloud, sickles reaping grapes, a two-hundred mile river of blood from these grapes, angels pouring wrath from golden bowls, mountains vanishing and islands running away. No, these pictures communicate that drastic punishment will come from God upon those who support the evils of the world system and against those who persecuted Christians – nothing more can be inferred and the details are not realistic depictions of actual events.

(3) As symbols what then are they representing? The key language under examination has its precedence in the Old Testament and helps clarify what is meant. In particular, the ‘fire and brimstone’ comes from Genesis 19:24 as the instruments by which Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed as Jude and Peter as well as Ezekiel (see 38:18-23) reference. Though the Apocalypse says that these will be an instrument of ‘torment’ that is only to add a detail to what they will do and not to disclose *all* that they do (see Revelation 18:8-10). “Fire and

Brimstone,” as types, bring destruction and desolation, and would be so understood as the result of God ‘tormenting,’ or punishing with it. This, strangely enough, can be shown from the following phrase, ‘the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever,’ which originates in Genesis 19:28 and is borrowed from Isaiah 34:9,10.

(4) Without grasp of these roots and with a medieval preconception, we tend to read the verse to say, ‘the smoke from their constantly burning bodies keeps on ascending and will continue to rise without end because they will always be burning.’ Leaving aside the numerous problems when read that strict, that understanding is simply not consistent with biblical language. The verse is best understood to teach that the temporary occurrence of torment with ‘fire and brimstone’ produced a destruction that will last forever. That is the language of ‘forever ascending smoke’ – a symbolic reminder of a permanent and complete desolation.

As noted, this imagery is taken from Isaiah 34:9-11 where Edom is promised the vengeance of God, its land ‘becomes burning pitch,’ not ‘quenched night or day’ and its ‘smoke will go up forever.’ Now clearly, the fire has long gone out, and the smoke is not ascending anymore. The language then is a metaphorical way of impressing on the mind the absolute and irrecoverable ‘desolation’ of a land that ‘none will pass through forever and ever,’ condemned to ‘emptiness,’ occupied only by wild animals.

Continuing, a similar image is constructed of Babylon in Revelation 19:3 saying, “Her smoke rises up forever and ever.” Here we have nearly the identical language of 14:11 to describe the ruin and extinction of the city. That fall is detailed back in chapter 18 - that is, she was ‘given torment to the degree she lived sensuously’ (v.7), her plagues will come in ‘one day’ (v.8), ‘she will be burned up with fire’ (v.8), there will be ‘lament over the smoke of her burning’ (v.9), further described as ‘her torment’ (v.10), ‘in one hour her judgment has come’ (v.10), her luxuries and ‘splendid things’ will have ‘passed away’ never to be found (v.14), she is ‘laid waste in an hour’ (v.19) and she will have been ‘thrown down with violence’ like a stone sinks into the sea and ‘will not be found any longer’ (v.21). Babylon is thus unmistakably pictured as being completely eradicated, burned up with fire, never to be

found, and that the language of ‘smoke rising forever and ever’ indicates not endless burning, but final destruction. No other interpretation is even permissible.

Further, note the connection between the ‘smoke of her burning’ as ‘her torment’ (v.10) which is conceptually equivalent to the ‘smoke of their torment’ in 14:11. So as Babylon endures ‘torment’ yet is ultimately destroyed, never to be found again, that language further implies that the ‘worshippers of the beast’ share the same end - not an endless burning, but complete destruction from an act of divine torment.

(5) Should the phrase *‘they have no rest day or night’* be insisted on signifying the consciousness of their torments while the previous phrase to which it is connected signifies the endless duration of the torment, we would only remark, that is mostly correct, with the exception that the latter clause is not likely to signify an infinite burning as has been shown. That is to say while they are alive and being judged (Chapter 16) they will find no intermission to their torments, but as these plagues end in death and have no reference to the afterlife we are compelled to understand the duration of torment to be finite, while the result of it (the smoke) is dramatically expressed in infinite terms to communicate its finality and permanence.

Moreover, the phrase seems to be contrasted with the saints who persevere and get to *‘rest from their labors’* (v.13). This lets them know that though they lack rest now and life is easy for their persecutors, the tables will soon turn. In sum, the message to the Christians appears to be this: Those that oppose you will soon be punished with no rest from their torments and whose end is a cursed, ‘second death,’ but should your rest come in a blessed death, your reward will soon follow in eternal life (v.13, cf. 20:4-6; 21:4-7).

Furthermore, even if the angel *is* expressing an eternity of conscious suffering the fact remains that it is a hyperbolic, audible warning heard in a vision and this is precisely why no text in the apocalypse will ever prove an actual eternity of torment. For without any further clarity of the emblem’s correlation to reality, the images do not explain themselves by themselves – the *actual* details are left undisclosed hidden under symbolic language. But putting all the pictures of the apocalypse together, as has been attempted, along with all the

data from outside of the book, the probability that the meaning of the angelic message is an actual endless tormenting, and not death and destruction is effectively zero.

In conclusion then, to understand Revelation 14:11 as depicting hell's eternal torments, one has to ignore the context and setting of the judgment, ignore the details of the judgments in Chapter 16, and ignore the fact the judgments end in death. Further, one must ignore the genre of the passage and interpret allegory literally, maintain physical absurdities, and disregard similar language in the OT with matching language in the same book that clearly demonstrates the picture is one of destruction. It would not be unwarranted then to state that the superior interpretation, amidst all the color of the apocalypse, is still not in favor of the Traditionalist, but found in terms of a tormenting punishment ending in destruction.

#### **Revelation 20:10**

**“...the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”**

Should this passage have found its way into any other book of scripture than the one it is in, the Traditionalist might have had a near impregnable proof-text, for this is the verbiage of ceaseless torments, and truly these are images of the orthodox dogma. As it stands however, such language is native only to this book of allegory and hyperbole, being wholly absent from the plainer and calmer portions of Scripture. And this is the very point: was there any good reason, if the doctrine of endless torment in hell were true, Paul forgot to use *this* language? If Peter believed it why did he not use equivalent descriptions? How did Luke or the writer of Hebrews, or John in his gospel and letters forget to similarly articulate such a danger? And would Jesus, believing this, fail to describe human fate in the same manner? How could they hide such a fate behind the words of death, destruction and perish which communicate something else? And can there be *any* reason why the NT authors, having at their disposal the very language of the Revelator with which to teach endless tormenting

explicitly, chose not to use it? There is only one answer that explains why and that is because none of them believed it. Such language belongs only to this genre of literature and such literature is not meant to be definitive or precise. That is why no text from it can or will ever ground the traditional view of hell. Allow, then, a few remarks to demonstrate that even this verse, with all its vibrancy, cannot sustain what it is required to prove.

(1) Taken perfectly literal, the most this verse can show is that *only* these three entities receive torment for ‘the ages of the ages.’ That is the extent of it and it cannot demonstrate the fate of *all* that enter the lake of fire, nor can it even prove that ‘the ages of the ages’ is an actual eternity.

(2) But there is no reason why the vision *should* be taken literally. We are dealing not with historical narrative, but with an allegory, the proof of which is found by the genre of literature it belongs to, along with the immediate context which contains numerous symbolic images. Note the angel holding in his hand *a key to the abyss and a great chain, a dragon bound by that chain, Gog and Magog, lake of fire and brimstone, beast and false prophet, great white throne, book of life, Death and Hades*, etc. These are not details of real events, but symbols depicting broad themes in a figurative manner. This passage can no more prove the dogma of hell than one could prove Jesus will actually ride the sky on a white horse with fire for eyes, wearing a robe drenched in blood with a sword coming out of his mouth.

(3) A “dragon” (20:2), a “wild animal” (literal Greek for *beast*) and a “false prophet” (also envisioned as a second wild beast, compare 13:11-16 with 19:20) are clearly symbols, and as such, their punishment *must also* be symbolical. How can the characters be emblematic and their fate not be? Given the fact that the punishment takes place in a figurative location in the first place – the ‘lake of fire’ – we are made certain the entire description is a symbolic visualization portraying the climactic ending between God and his prime opponents. It conveys the general theme that these three figures will be punished powerfully and severely for all their malevolence; they will not harass or trouble any longer, and that God will condemn and conquer. Thus, John’s vision consists of a dragon and two wild animals being tossed and tormented in a lake of fire for an indefinite amount of time – that is the extent of the vision and nothing more can be ascertained. Further, we cannot use the details of the

allegory to ground a literal description of the *actual* eschatological punishing of Satan, just as we cannot conclude the fallen angel is really a fire-breathing, flying reptile complete with wings and scales.

(4) As for the others, it is not certain what these symbols even represent, or how God will actually terminate their reign. Here is the key point again: in the apocalyptic drama, these characters are *personifications* and thus have a *personified punishment*, and as such, the details of the punishment (namely, “tormented day and night into the ages of the ages”) cannot serve up any realistic facts, nor do they disclose anything about the actual eschatological punishing of these entities. Perhaps the ‘beast,’ for example, refers to a political institution in real-life, and the ‘false prophet’ refers to a religious institution, what sense would it make to speak of an endless torment for these impersonal entities? In other words, in an allegory you can make Rome and false religions the wildest beasts imaginable – animals that talk, have multiple horns and heads, and that can be killed, tormented, lashed, punished, burnt alive, etc. The author can represent these institutions as personal agents and the method allows him to depict their punishment in more vivid and striking terms – that is, a description of the punishment of *sentient* creatures who can suffer and languish is more compelling and dynamic than describing the termination of abstractions like political and religious systems. The narrative, thus, can say nothing about how impersonal powers will *actually* be destroyed.

(5) But what is more, although most interpreters understand the beasts to be impersonal institutions, what these symbols represent are essentially *unknown*. Consequently the *exact nature of their* punishment must *also* remain unidentified. As there is no explanation of who or what these beasts are, there can be no *specific* details of their fate. Ultimately and quite plainly, the passage is an exaggerated personification to impress the reader with the notion that God will intensely punish and overthrow these forces of evil, who represent, in general, hostility toward and opposition to the righteous.

(6) Furthermore, granting the extremely improbable scenario, for argument sake, that each of these characters represent three actual individuals and that their symbolic punishment actually corresponds perfectly to reality, this passage *still does not preclude the prospect* that even *these* beings will be exterminated. In fact, considering all the biblical data on the subject they

are *most likely* to be destroyed, *not* tormented for all eternity. Their eventual extinction is supported by a variety of evidences.

(i) The original reads, ‘into the eons of the eons’ or ‘into the ages of the ages’ not ‘forever and ever.’ Though this translation captures the essence of the phrase, we recognize it at once as hyperbole being commonly so used. We use it poetically to describe the longest imaginable length of time, as in I will love you ‘forever and ever’ which means, ‘forever until I cannot do so any longer.’ It is not a technically precise declaration for an actual eternity, only a dramatic way of saying for as long as possible. ‘The ages of the ages’ is thus an indefinite amount of time finding its duration in connection to the object referred to. So in reference to God, we know ‘into the ages of the ages’ is an actual infinity because of his endless nature, but to temporal and finite things the phrase is naturally limited. For example Psalm 148:6 speaks of the heavens and earth as being ‘established forever and ever’ but they will not last through eternity for they will give way to new ones. We might also recall the smoke rising ‘forever and ever’ in Isaiah 34 and Revelation 19:3 as denoting an indefinite but limited amount of time. Also, 2 Kings 5:27, Psalm 83:17, Matthew 21:19, and Philemon 15 are among numerous examples of the word ‘forever’ limited to the duration of the entity spoken of. The point is that the phrasing ‘into the ages of the ages’ is a loose and lyrical way of saying a long, long time of *indefinite* duration. When applied to the torment of three figures in the lake of fire it can only mean for as long as any of them exist, not disclosing when, how or if it will end.

(ii) We will assume, again for argument, a literal ‘lake of fire’ and grant it some physical location within the creation in order to show that it has no eternal existence. Because the Revelator does not explicitly say so, we will not press the point that it is pictured on the Earth. It must, however, be *somewhere* in the cosmos and allow us to make the point that it will pass away as part of the old order of things. That is to say, being a part of the old creation, this ‘lake’ has no place in the new heavens and new Earth, as God is ‘making *all* things new’ (21:5, cf. vii below). But regardless, the ‘lake of fire’ being a symbol cannot be given

spatial qualities or real geographical existence in the first place, the point is only made to show that the ‘ages of ages’ cannot be an actual infinity because the ‘lake of fire’ is not eternally enduring.

- (iii) The nature of the “lake of fire” thus significantly bears on the import of the present verse under discussion. As the ‘lake of fire’ symbolizes the ‘second death’ (20:14) there are no grounds to state that objects thrown into it are not exterminated. This point must be urged: If the image of a fiery lake did not already impress on us a place of death and destruction (being a natural deduction) it is explicitly said to be so – “the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). Compare this with Daniel chapter 7, from which the events of Revelation undoubtedly draw from and coincide with. The “beast,” which is a “kingdom” (7:23), is “slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire” (7:11). Clearly this is similar language to describe a similar event. Therefore we must go against common sense (what happens to something thrown into a fire), common biblical usage of ‘fire and brimstone’ denoting destruction, and explicit statements of its fatal nature if we are to make the ‘lake of fire’ mean endless torment and not a picture of cremation.
  
- (iv) Neither can it be urged that ‘the second death’ does not mean extinction, for again that is its most natural meaning. The burden falls on the Orthodox to show that ‘second death’ means endless, conscious suffering, but again this would be too far a stretch. To call something ‘second’ it must bear some resemblance to a ‘first,’ and as the first death resembles nothing remotely close to a conscious torment, we are not justified in concluding that the ‘second’ will be of that nature. On the contrary, the first death resulted in the extinction of life, compelling the belief that the second death will do the same. The only difference being the first death is interrupted by a resurrection (20:12,13), the second time kills permanently.

- (v) This idea of deletion is further proven by the type of objects that are thrown into the “lake of fire.” Whatever it signifies, it must be able to account for both personal *and* impersonal objects. That is to say, interpretations must make sense of the fact that *Death and Hades* (20:14) are also thrown into it. Everlasting torment would make nonsense of the symbolism, as ‘death and Hades’ cannot be tormented. Annihilation, on the other hand, suits the imagery perfectly. Clearly they are pictured as being abolished and brought to nothing for what else could it mean to put ‘death and Hades’ into the ‘second death?’ As we read in the next few verses, God makes all things new and there is ‘no more death.’ There is thus overwhelming warrant to interpret the imagery of the ‘lake of fire’ as the place where all things contrary to God and the New Creation are put to death and out of existence. So when it is said that the beast will be go to ‘destruction’ (17:8,11), it is understood to mean that it will suffer the same fate of death and Hades – extinction.
- (vi) In addition, the same end of destruction is elsewhere noted in scripture as awaiting the Devil. Importantly, neither the Devil, nor his angels are ever stated to be eternal, immortal, or as going to exist as long as God will live. To the contrary the Bible explicitly states and deductively notes that they will in fact be destroyed. First, we are told that the ‘eternal fire’ awaits the Devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41) and Jude explains unambiguously that this is a fire that consumes and destroys (v.7). It is called ‘eternal’ because of the results of its effects, destroying with finality and permanence. Manifestly similar to the ‘unquenchable fire’ of Mark 9 and Matthew 3:12, the ‘eternal’ fire, once more, is not called ‘eternal’ because of its duration, but on account of its power and efficacy in eternally destroying. Furthermore, Luke 4:34 and Mark 1:24 specifically mention that the demons expected and feared destruction, “Have you come to destroy us?” Matthew 8:29 and Mark 5:7 mention that the demons also expected and feared ‘torment,’ however this only shows there would be suffering involved in the punishment which would destroy them. Further, it is worth mentioning Paul’s promise that God will “crush Satan under” the feet of the saints (Romans 16:20).

- (vii) More support is given to this thesis by considering the transitory nature of all things contrary to God's everlasting reign and kingdom. Hebrews 12:26-29 intends to state all things that are created and shakable will be removed. That is nothing in the heavens and earth are enduring, but transitory, that they will be removed and replaced by a permanent kingdom that will remain forever. Paul and John make a similar point in 1 Corinthians 7:31, and 1 John 2:17, 'the form of this world is passing away.' Paul again in 2 Corinthians 4:18, 'the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' Peter is more vivid, '...the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up...the heavens will be destroyed by burning and the elements will melt with intense heat' (2 Peter 3:10-12). Jesus is equally explicit that 'heaven and earth will pass away' (Matthew 5:18, 24:35). All this to say that the current order is temporary, the present creation and its workings will be destroyed, and the coming new creation of God is a renovation to last forever. In addition, there does not appear the slightest proof that any evil creature or power will escape the elemental melting of the consuming fire, and so fail to *pass away* with the old heavens and earth.
- (viii) Lastly, and similar to the above, the *restoration of all things* supports the non-existence of all unrighteous entities in the new creation. Acts 3:21, speaks of Christ having to remain in heaven until the time for the 'restoration of all things.' Paul teaches that the creation will be 'set free from its slavery to corruption' (Romans 8:19-22), that all things in creation will bow to the lordship of Christ (Philippians 2:9,10), that at the appropriate time God will 'sum up' all things in the heavens and earth in Christ (Ephesians 1:10), that God will reconcile all things to Himself, whether things in the heavens or on earth (Colossians 1:20), and that Christ will abolish *all* enemies, every rule, every authority and all power, including death; *all* things will be subject to Christ who in turns submits to God so that God will be 'all in all' (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). And as 2 Peter 3:13 says, 'we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.'

That is to say, unrighteousness does *not* dwell in them. Unmistakably this shows that there is no place in the new creation for unrighteous beings, and consequently, the devil will have no existence in the new order where all submit to Christ, reconciled to God who is all in all. The point is most famously pictured in the apocalypse where envisioned are the creation of a new heaven and new earth for the first ones passed away. God will dwell there, He will wipe away every tear, there will no longer be death, mourning, crying or pain, for the ‘first things have passed away.’ God is ‘making all things new’ (Revelation 21:1-5). No wicked creature, angel or man, has any part or right to the new kingdom or new creation. Their part is in the lake of fire, which is the second death (21:8), which does not belong to the new creation. It, with all its inhabitants, will pass away with the first order of things. To imagine, then, after reading the above, that Paul, Peter and John envisioned a place of suffering, sentient, rebellious and unrighteous creatures, not only existing in the new creation, but existing for as long as the kingdom of God, is preposterous in the highest degree. Sin and sinners were all to be annihilated with the old creation and only righteousness would dwell in the new heavens and new earth.

In conclusion, Revelation 20:10 will never prove the traditional position on hell. Placed in its proper literary context, the passage is symbolical and the language is hyperbole, revealing nothing of any actual, realistic punishment. Furthermore, the Traditionalist interpretation gives no intelligible meaning to what the ‘lake of fire’ actually is, why it is called the ‘second death’ or how to account for impersonal objects cast into it. No consideration is given to other parts of scripture that teach the devil and his angels will be destroyed, nor can the Traditionalist ever explain why the apocalyptic language is missing in the rest of the entire New Testament. In addition, it unjustifiably gives transitory creatures and wickedness an eternal dwelling in the new creation – strangely imagining *that* as a ‘restoring of all things.’ It is thus a firm conviction that the Traditionalist has not played fair with this text – torn from its context, it is shamelessly exploited to promote a dogma that has no legitimate support.