

THE DESTRUCTION OF HELL: ANNIHILATIONISM EXAMINED

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INTRODUCTION

Every Christian doctrine has its day to be attacked – and defended. The Christian Church, from its conception, has believed in such magnificent teachings as the existence of a theistic God, the possibility of miracles, the uniqueness of Christ, the truth of His inerrant and infallible Word, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the necessity of God’s eternal judgment of those who do not accept His offer of eternal life in Jesus. Yet, all of these doctrines have been attacked by skeptics, critics, cultists, and even those within the Christian faith. It is natural to question why all of these beliefs have become so unbelievable in this modern day.

For the past century there has been a battle for the traditional doctrine of Hell. The results of the battle have culminated in the erroneous teachings of various evangelical Christian leaders as well as the cults of Christianity. Why has the belief in a literal, eternal hell as a punishment for those who reject God become so unpopular? Is it because new exegetical discoveries in modern biblical scholarship have ruled out the traditional view of hell? Not at all. Regarding the traditional view of hell, one author says, “These truths have become awkward and disconcerting to hold not because of new light from the Bible but because of new darkness from the culture.”¹

The darkness of the culture has produced a rejection of the doctrine of hell. In its place, a growing number of scholars, evangelical and non-evangelical alike, have embraced a view of the destiny of the unbeliever called *annihilationism* or *conditional immortality*. This teaching denies the eternal punishing of the unbeliever, and thus, the orthodox Christian doctrine of hell.² It is the purpose of this paper to examine the teachings of Clark Pinnock and John R. W. Stott, two evangelical scholars who teach annihilationism. It is my desire to demonstrate that annihilationism is untrue, being built on faulty reason and unsound biblical interpretation. Thus, I place myself in the company of those who hold the orthodox doctrine of the eternal punishing of the unbeliever in a literal place called hell, “where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched’” (Mark 9:48; cf. Isaiah 66:24).

¹ David F. Wells, forward to *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment*, by Robert A. Peterson. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1995), x.

² In the debate between those who hold to the orthodox doctrine of hell and the annihilationists, there is a distinction made between eternal punishment and eternal punishing. Annihilationists claim that punishment is eternal in that the results of annihilation is eternal—one is annihilated for all eternity. It is, therefore, an eternal punishment. This is in distinction to hell, which is an eternal punishing. In other words, hell is a place where the punishing is continual, ongoing, everlasting.

THE CASE FOR ANNIHILATIONISM

In his book *Studies in Theology*, B. B. Warfield maintained that there are three different forms of annihilationism: pure mortalism, conditional immortality, and annihilationism.³ However, because the advocates of the three views are not always careful to keep within the logical limits of their position, mixed versions of the theories are often held. Pure mortalism is the concept that human life is innately bound up with the physical body, so that when the body dies the person also passes out of existence. Those who hold this view believe that this annihilation applies to all persons, so it is not normally found within Christian theologies. Therefore, pure mortalism will not be considered further in this paper.

The other two views, conditional immortality and annihilationism, are sometimes used as synonyms, but can refer to slightly different positions.⁴ When used differently, conditional immortality refers to the view that human beings are by nature mortal. In the case of those who believe the gospel, God gives immortality, or eternal life, so they “survive” death. However, in the case of the unbeliever, God simply allows them to become extinct, or pass out of existence. The essential point is that “human beings are not naturally immortal but must have immortality conferred by God.”⁵ On the other hand, annihilationism proper is the view that humans are naturally immortal. Thus the unbeliever does not pass out of existence simply due to death, but is annihilated, or destroyed, as a direct result of God’s punishment because of their unbelief. Therefore, in opposition to the traditional view of hell, the annihilationist believes that unbelievers undergo an “everlasting punishment, not everlasting punishing, in that the result of their judgment – annihilation – lasts forever.”⁶

Annihilationism has become a fire that is burning throughout the hallowed halls of modern religious scholarship. For instance, several non-Christian religious groups, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses,⁷ hold to some form of this view, as well as some evangelical Christians such as John Stott and Clark Pinnock, who are actively fanning the flame of this doctrine which denies the church’s traditional view of hell.⁸

³ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994) 1237.

⁴ Gary Habermas and J. P. Moreland, *Immortality: The Other Side of Death* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 169.

⁵ Millard Erickson, “Is Hell Forever?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September, 1995): p. 259-272.

⁶ Habermas and Moreland, *Immortality*, 169.

⁷ In the Jehovah’s Witness book *Let God Be True* (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1946, p. 99), the following quote is found: “The doctrine of a burning hell where the wicked are tortured eternally after death cannot be true, mainly for four reasons: (1) It is wholly unscriptural; (2) it is unreasonable; (3) it is contrary to God’s love, and (4) it is repugnant to justice. From this it is appreciated more that Gehenna is the condition of destruction where the Devil, his demons, and all human opposers of Jehovah’s theocratic government will go and from which condition there is no resurrection or recovery.”

⁸ I am in no way suggesting that annihilationism is false just because some cults teach it or because it is not the doctrine that the church has traditionally believed throughout the centuries. What would make annihilationism false is that it is contrary to Scripture. However, the fact that this doctrine has not been believed until recently is certainly a warning sign that annihilation might not be true.

Arguments for the doctrine of annihilationism, the complete destruction of the soul of the unbeliever, frequently fall into three general categories: moral, linguistic, and exegetical.⁹

Moral Arguments

Annihilationists believe that in order to insure that God is a moral, equitable God, annihilationism must be true. It alone guarantees that God maintains his moral perfection and judicial integrity. In the words of Clark Pinnock, professor of systematic theology at McMaster Divinity College and one of the most vocal modern proponents of annihilation, “this ‘capital punishment’ view of the final judgment at least does not involve a deity who is endlessly vindictive, and a new creation where heaven and hell exist alongside each other forever.”¹⁰

Pinnock is certainly an outspoken critic of the traditional view of hell. He remarks,

The traditional understanding of hell is unspeakably horrible. How can one imagine for a moment that the God who gave his Son to die for sinners because of his great love for them would install a torture chamber somewhere in the new creation in order to subject those who reject him to everlasting pain?¹¹

Annihilationists argue that the doctrine of unending, conscious punishment in hell is unjust and immoral. They claim that the traditional view of hell requires that God act “in a way that contradicts his goodness and offends our moral sense.”¹² In fact, Pinnock passionately argues this point by stating,

Let me say at the outset that I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine, a theological and moral enormity, a bad doctrine of the tradition which needs to be changed. How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they may have been? Surely a God who would do such a thing is more nearly like Satan than like God, at least by any ordinary moral standards, and by the gospel itself. . . . Surely the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is no fiend; torturing people without end is not what our God does.¹³

Pinnock states elsewhere that “the popular tradition concerning the nature of punishment that some of the wicked will have to suffer is morally flawed.”¹⁴ Annihilationists teach that God

⁹ Alan W. Gnomes, “Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell, Part Two.” *Christian Research Journal* (Summer, 1991), 9.

¹⁰ Pinnock, *Fire, Then Nothing*, 40.

¹¹ Clark Pinnock, “Fire, Then Nothing.” *Christianity Today* 20 (March, 1987) 40.

¹² Clark Pinnock, “The Conditional View,” in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 149.

¹³ Clark Pinnock, “The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent,” *Criswell Theological Review* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1990) 246-27, 253. Quoted in Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, 161.

¹⁴ Pinnock, “Fire, Then Nothing,” *Christianity Today* 20 (March, 1987) 40.

could not be a God who has created man in his own image and then torture him in hell forever. In other words, a moral God, a God of endless mercy and love, would never punish the impenitent in a literal, eternal hell.

Those who hold to annihilation reason that an eternal hell is less than moral and certainly unjust because it is a punishment that in no way fits the crime. Biblically, God is viewed as boundlessly merciful and loving towards the whole world, “not a cruel and sadistic torturer.”¹⁵ According to the annihilation proponents, the conventional view of hell “amounts to an infinite punishment for a finite life of sin, and thus it is a disproportionate punishment, which contradicts divine justice.”¹⁶ Eternal hell could not be the creation of a loving, merciful God. John Stott, former rector at All Soul’s Church in London, sets forth this reasoning to prove that the traditional doctrine of hell is unjust:

The Bible teaches that God will judge people “according to what they have done” (e.g. Rev. 20:12), which implies that the penalty inflicted will be commensurate with the evil done. But because eternal torment is seriously disproportionate to sins committed in time, it clashes with the biblical revelation of divine justice.¹⁷

Pinnock agrees,

Let readers ask themselves what lifestyle, what set of actions, would deserve the ultimate of penalties – everlasting conscious punishment? . . . It is too heavy a sentence and cannot be successfully defended as a just action on God’s part. Sending the wicked to everlasting torment would be to treat persons worse than they could deserve.¹⁸

Thus, Stott and Pinnock agree that annihilation of unbelievers solves the moral problems they conclude are associated with the traditional doctrine of hell. God does not “maintain an everlasting Auschwitz for victims whom he does not even allow to die.”¹⁹ Rather, he annihilates, or destroys them. For the annihilationist, this belief is much easier to harmonize with the biblical revelation of the mercy and love of God than the traditional view of hell. Furthermore, according to its protagonists, annihilationism is easier to harmonize with the justice of God than is the orthodox view of hell. Annihilationism insures that the punishment fits the crime. Pinnock declares:

If people refuse God’s friendship, it would not be right to visit on them a punishment beyond what was deserved, such as everlasting conscious torture would be. What would be

¹⁵ Pinnock, *Four Views on Hell*, 149.

¹⁶ Habermas and Moreland, *Immortality*, 172.

¹⁷ David Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 318-19.

¹⁸ Pinnock, *Four Views on Hell*, 151-52.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

just is not to keep totally corrupt people alive forever. God has no obligation to keep such souls alive. Destruction is the obvious fate for them.²⁰

Linguistic Arguments

Annihilationists also point to the fact that several of the key terms used in the biblical passages about the fate of the unbeliever should be understood as referring to annihilation, not everlasting torment. For instance, Dr. Stott contends that we should understand the Bible literally when it speaks of the unbeliever “perishing,” or suffering “destruction.”²¹ He claims that “It would seem strange, therefore, if people who are said to suffer destruction are in fact not destroyed.”²² Hence, the annihilationists argue that the very words used in the Bible lead one to view annihilationism as true.

Annihilationists assume words like ‘perish,’ ‘destroy,’ and ‘cut off’ indicate utter annihilation. These words “say what the conditionalist wishes to convey . . . and the conditionalist is confident that the ordinary man in the street can tell us what those words usually mean to him”²³ To put it another way, any Tom, Dick, or Harry has enough sense to see in these words that annihilationism is taught in the Bible.

To argue from the Old Testament, the annihilationists point to the Hebrew term *abad* as referring to the total destruction of the wicked. For instance, *abad* is found in Proverbs 11:10: “When the wicked perish (*abad*), there is glad shouting.” Also, *abad* is used to speak of sinners being “destroyed” in Psalm 143:12 and Psalm 9:5. It is also used of wooden idols being “destroyed” in 1 Kings 2:18. To the annihilationist, being destroyed or perishing must refer to annihilationism. Furthermore, annihilationists cite several references that state that the sinner is “cut off” (*karath*) as proof of annihilationism. For example, they cite Psalm 37, which says that “evildoers will be cut off” (v. 9), “those cursed by Him will be cut off” (v. 22), “the descendants of the wicked will be cut off” (v. 28), “When the wicked are cut off” (v. 34), and “The posterity of the wicked will be cut off” (v. 38). Thus, the words “cut off” are cited as proof that the wicked are annihilated instead of continuing forever in a literal hell.

In the New Testament, the verb *apollumi* is translated “destroy” and its noun form *apoleia* as “destruction.” The proponents of the annihilation of the soul claim that this word refers to total destruction of physical life on earth and, thus, total destruction of the soul in hell. Annihilationists such as Stott cite Matthew 2:13, “Herod is going to search for the Child to *destroy* Him,” as evidence for destruction of physical life. Also, he cites as evidence Matthew 12:14, “the Pharisees went out, and counseled together against Him, as to how they might *destroy* Him.” He then refers to Matthew 10:28, “And do not fear those who kill the body, but

²⁰ Ibid., 153.

²¹ Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, 162.

²² Edwards and Stott, *Evangelical Essentials*, 315-16.

²³ Edward Fudge, “‘The Plain Meaning’: A Review Essay,” *Henceforth* 14 (1985), 23-24. Quoted in Alan W. Gomes, “The Annihilation of Hell: Part Two,” *Christian Research Journal* (Summer, 1991), 10.

are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell,” to affirm the soul is completely destroyed in hell.²⁴ They reason that if it is total destruction of physical life on earth, then it must be total destruction of the soul in hell.

Exegetical Arguments

Annihilationists believe that, in conjunction with the moral and linguistic arguments, the overall teaching of the Word of God is on their side. According to Pinnock:

The Bible does leave us a strong general impression in regard to the nature of hell – the impression of final, irreversible destruction, of closure with God. . . . The Bible uses the language of death and destruction, of ruin and perishing, when it speaks of the fate of the impenitent wicked. It uses the imagery of fire that consumes whatever is thrown into it; linking together images of fire and destruction suggests annihilation. One receives the impression that ‘eternal punishment’ refers to a divine judgment whose results cannot be reversed rather than to the experience of endless torment (i.e., eternal punishing).²⁵

For example, in his defense of annihilationism found in the book *Four Views on Hell*, Pinnock refers to several passages of Scripture which support his point of view. First, Pinnock claims the Old Testament undeniably teaches annihilationism by stating that it “gives us a clear picture of the end of the wicked in terms of destruction and supplies the basic imagery of divine judgment for the New Testament to use.”²⁶ Pinnock then points to Psalm 37:

We read that the wicked will fade like the grass and wither like the herb (v. 2), that they will be cut off and be no more (vv. 9-10), that they will perish and vanish like smoke (v. 20), and that they will be altogether destroyed (v. 38).²⁷

Malachi 4:1-2 is also quoted as an Old Testament text which teaches that the wicked will be annihilated instead of suffering in hell for all eternity:

For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” Says the LORD of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves (Mal. 4:1-2).

Pinnock claims that the Old Testament “overwhelmingly denotes destruction and perishing and sets the tone for the New Testament doctrine (of divine judgment).”²⁸

²⁴ Edwards and Stott, *Evangelical Essentials*, 315

²⁵ Pinnock, *Four Views on Hell*, 144.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Second, Pinnock examines the New Testament teachings of Jesus, claiming that “Jesus said many things that support the impression that the Old Testament gives of hell as final destruction.”²⁹ He surmises that “Our Lord spoke plainly of God’s judgment as the annihilation of the wicked when he warned about God’s ability to destroy body and soul in hell (Matt. 10:28).”³⁰ Additionally, Jesus “was echoing the terms that John the Baptist had used when he pictured the wicked as dry wood about to be thrown into the fire and chaff about to be burned (Matt. 3:10, 12).”³¹ Pinnock also mentions that Jesus taught that “the wicked would be burned up just like weeds thrown into the fire (Matt. 13:30, 42, 49-50).”³² He, therefore, teaches that “the impression Jesus leaves us with is a strong one: the impenitent wicked can expect to be destroyed by the wrath of God.”³³

Third, Pinnock mentions the writings of Paul, such as 1 Corinthians 3:17 and Philippians 1:28, both of which speak of “destruction.” Also, he believes Paul, in Romans 1:32, speaks of the fate of the unbeliever as a deserved death, the wages of their sin (6:23). Moreover, Pinnock adds, “Concerning the wicked, the apostle stated plainly and concisely: ‘Their destiny is destruction’ (Philippians 3:19).” He states, “In all these verses, Paul made it clear that hell would mean termination.”³⁴

Finally, Pinnock refers to the writings of other New Testament authors to support the annihilation of the “impenitent wicked.” He begins with the book of 2nd Peter, which in light of Pinnock’s interpretation, teaches annihilation:

Peter spoke of the “destruction of ungodly men” (2 Pet. 3:7) and of false teachers who denied the Lord, thus bringing upon themselves “swift destruction” (2:1,3). He said that they would be like the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah that were burned to ashes (2:6), and that they would perish like the ancient world perished in the great Flood (3:6-7).³⁵

Pinnock gathers further New Testament testimony by referring to Hebrews 10:39 in which the author states, “But we are not of those who shrink back *and are destroyed*, but of those who believe and are saved.” Pinnock concludes his New Testament references to annihilationism by specifying Revelation 20:14-15, which “speaks both of a lake of fire that will consume the wicked and of the second death.”³⁶

In Pinnock’s opinion, the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, teaches the doctrine of annihilation. He states that “Throughout its pages, following the Old Testament lead, the New

²⁹ Ibid., 145-46.

³⁰ Ibid., 146.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Testament employs images of death, perishing, destruction, and corruption to describe the end of the wicked.”³⁷ He adds, “A fair person would have to conclude from such texts that the Bible can reasonably be read to teach the final destruction of the wicked.”³⁸

This has only been a brief treatment of the arguments that Pinnock and Stott forward to prove the position that the soul of the unbeliever is totally destroyed. However, I submit that a “fair person” would not conclude that the Bible teaches the destruction of the wicked, but a literal, fiery hell which is eternally inhabited by those who reject the witness of God in creation, conscious, and Christ. The Bible has much to say about this hell and the following section will seek to refute the ideas that have been forwarded by those who teach the annihilation of the soul of the unbeliever.

THE CASE AGAINST ANNIHILATION

The traditional doctrine of hell has been held by a preponderance of theologians throughout the nearly two-thousand year history of the Christian church. Hell proves that God is a God of love and that man has free will to accept or reject this love. In opposition to the annihilationist’s teaching of the eternal destiny of the unbeliever, the traditional doctrine states that hell is a place unbelievers will inhabit for all eternity, experiencing the awful consequences of rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ. In fact, the Bible promises that Jesus will take “vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:8-9).

Hell is assuredly not a place where the unbeliever is totally taken out of existence, as Pinnock and Stott would have us believe, but a place of eternal, conscious punishment for the unbeliever which is described in the Scripture as “unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12), “damnation” (Matt. 23:33), “furnace of fire” (Matt. 13:42, 50), “blackness and darkness” (Jude 13), a “lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (Rev. 21:8), and a place “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41).³⁹

The remainder of this paper will seek to answer the moral, linguistic, and exegetical arguments forwarded by the annihilationism proponents in order to prove the view false, and thereby upholding the traditional doctrine of hell that is surely taught throughout the Bible.

Answering the Moral Arguments

To the annihilationist, the traditional doctrine of hell is “morally flawed” and makes God into an immoral, unjust, unloving God who is more nearly like Satan than God. This is simply not true. In fact, the love and justice of God demand that there is a literal, eternal hell for the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. On the basis of the information provided above, it is Pinnock’s desire that “the traditionalists will stop saying that there is no biblical basis for this view when there is such a strong basis for it” (*Four Views of Hell*, 147).

³⁹ Walter Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 506.

unbeliever.⁴⁰ Dr. Norman Geisler explains that even though unbelievers inhabit in a literal, fiery hell, God is still a God of infinite love. He says, “Absolute love, far from being incompatible with hell, actually demands its existence.”⁴¹ God is not in the business of forcing His love on people against their will or forcing people to return His love against their will. That would make the people mere robots and God a type of “divine rapist.” God loves man enough to endow him with a free will – the ability to embrace or reject Him. Geisler maintains that “those who do not wish to love God must be allowed not to love Him. Those who do not wish to be with Him must be allowed to be separated from Him. Hell is this eternal separation from God.”⁴² To put it another way, hell is God’s loving gift to those who reject Him. To annihilate those who reject Him would be akin to killing a child because he does not obey. Therefore, annihilation is more unloving than allowing the unbeliever to live in hell forever.

Moreover, the justice of God is not compromised in the traditional doctrine of hell as Pinnock and Stott would have us believe. Geisler states, “The existence of a place of punishment for the wicked after this life is necessary to maintain the justice of God.”⁴³ In truth, it is clearly more unjust to “extinguish humans with an intrinsic value than to allow them to continue living in a state with a low quality of life.”⁴⁴ In other words, annihilation is more immoral and unjust than the traditional view of hell because it is worse to destroy the life of a valuable creature created in the image of God than it is to allow him to go on living in hell forever, which is what he has chosen by the rejection of God.

The eternal punishing of the unbeliever in hell also maintains the justice of God because, contrary to the opinion of Stott and Pinnock, it is the punishment that fits the crime. Even though the sin was committed in time, it warrants an eternal punishment because the sin was against an infinitely holy God. Systematic Theologian William G. T. Shedd aptly states:

Endless punishment is rational, because sin is an infinite evil; infinite not because committed by an infinite being, but against one. . . . To torture a dumb beast is a crime; to torture a man is a greater crime. To steal from one’s own mother is more heinous than to steal from a fellow citizen. The person who transgresses is the same in each instance; but the different

⁴⁰ Norman Geisler, “Everything You Wanted to Know About Hell but were Afraid to Ask,” *Discipleship Journal*, Issue 87, 1995, 32-34.

⁴¹ Norman Geisler and Josh McDowell, *Love is Always Right* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), 54.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Habermas and Moreland, *Immortality*, 173. This claim is paralleled to certain end-of-life ethical issues such as infanticide (intentionally taking the life of a defective newborn) or euthanasia. Some argue that it is certainly moral to take the life of those who have a low quality of life. However, Habermas and Moreland explain that sanctity of life advocates argue against this position on several points: (1) It calls for the intentional taking of human life, which is wrong (except in war, self-defense, or capital punishment). (2) It fails to respect the incredible intrinsic value and dignity of persons by extinguishing them. (3) It treats persons as means to an end (people and death are used as a means to the end of removing a low-quality-of-life state by killing the patient) rather than as ends in themselves. See *Immortality*, 173-74.

worth and dignity of the objects upon whom his action terminates makes the difference in the gravity of the two offenses.⁴⁵

Geisler concurs:

Only eternal punishment will suffice for sins against the eternal God. . . . Furthermore, no sin can be tolerated as long as God exists, and He is eternal. Hence, the punishment for sin must also be eternal.⁴⁶

Is, therefore, the doctrine of hell unloving and unjust? By no means! God, in accordance with His infinite love, has allowed man to choose his own destiny – heaven or hell. Those who enter hell go completely of their own accord. To put it another way, God does not send anyone to hell – it is the destiny of choice for those who go there. As C. S. Lewis put it:

There are only two kinds of people in the end: Those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “*Thy* will be done.” All that are in hell choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell.⁴⁷

Furthermore, hell is a loving gift as a place of separation from God, His people, and the activities that occur in heaven. Geisler adds:

If God allowed unbelievers to enter heaven, it would be worse than hell for them. How could people who detest prayer and praise to God stand to be sentenced to a place where this activity goes on forever? . . . How could a loving God force people to go there when they don’t want to worship Him but rather hate and ignore Him as they have in this life? It is more congruent with the nature of divine love not to compel people to love Him against their will. Therefore God is actually merciful to unbelievers to provide for them a place consistent with their rejection of Him.⁴⁸

The annihilationists moral arguments against the traditional doctrine of hell fail completely. Rather than compromising the morality, love, and justice of God, the traditional view of hell proves that God is infinitely loving, moral, and just. Only a God of love could allow man to reject His love. And, as Geisler notes, “Wrath is the result of rejected love. . . . The only place in the universe where people will be free from the perturbations of love is hell. Hell is where love no longer works or woos.”⁴⁹

The God of love has displayed His love for all to see and embrace. However, there are still those who reject it. And God, because He refuses to violate the free will of man, lovingly allows

⁴⁵ William G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock Christian Publishers, 1980), 152.

⁴⁶ Geisler, “Everything You Wanted to Know About Hell,” *Discipleship Journal*, 33.

⁴⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), 72.

⁴⁸ Geisler and McDowell, *Love is Always Right*, 55.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

them to remain as they choose – unrepentant, unconverted, unforgiven. C. S. Lewis comments on the man who has rejected the wooing of God, “He has his wish – to live wholly in the self and to make the best of what he finds there. And what he finds there is Hell.”⁵⁰ The existence of a literal, eternal hell truly proves that God is love and man is free.

Answering the Linguistic Arguments

As seen above, to the annihilationist, the words used to describe the fate of the unbeliever such as ‘destroy,’ ‘perish,’ ‘consume,’ and ‘cut off’ indicate a total annihilation of the unbeliever. This claim can be shown to be false. For example, Robert Morey, in his book *Death and the Afterlife*, answers the claims of the annihilationists by rightly pointing out that,

[They] simply *assert* that these terms mean annihilation. Neither Fromm nor those who follow him offer any lexicographical evidence or exegetical material. But starting from their unfounded assumption that these words mean annihilation . . . they always claim the authors were conditional immortalists. They assume that any piece of literature which uses these words automatically teaches conditionalism.⁵¹

The problem with the annihilationists most basic linguistic assumption is that it is simply false. The words which are translated ‘destroy,’ ‘perish,’ ‘consume,’ or ‘cut off’ can mean a number of things, depending on the context, but never refer to the total annihilation of the soul. The only way that annihilation is found in any text is for the annihilationist to read his assumption into the text – that words such as ‘destroy’ or ‘perish’ mean annihilation. Once this foundational assumption is overturned, their linguistic arguments are exposed for what they are – erroneous.

For example, the various forms of the words ‘destroy’ or ‘destruction’ appear 512 times in the New King James Version. Morey states that “they represent 50 different Hebrew words and 12 different Greek words. None of them have the lexicographical meaning of ‘annihilation’ or ‘to cause something to pass into nonexistence’”⁵² Rather, they have a wide range of meaning. The uses of these words in the Old Testament range from men being “sold into slavery” (Num. 21:29), to donkeys being “lost” (1 Sam. 9:3, 20), or even to denote a vessel which is “broken” (Ps. 31:12). In no case in the Old Testament are these words speaking of the soul’s annihilation into nonexistence.

Annihilationists refer to several Old Testament passages to affirm that *abad* refers to annihilation. Yet, a close look at the context of the specific passages shows that their claims are unfounded. For instance they point to Proverbs 11:10, which says, “When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, And when the wicked perish, there is glad shouting.” A plain reading reveals that the main idea found is that both the righteous and the wicked have an effect on public life. A city is blessed by the rule of godly men and overthrown by the rule of wicked men.

⁵⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 110.

⁵¹ Robert Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis: Betheny House Publishers, 1984), 108.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 109.

Therefore, the population rejoices when the righteous rule with success, and the public rejoices when the wicked are taken out of ruling positions due, possibly, to physical death. Their influence, or possibly their very life on earth ends. Hence, this proverb has nothing whatsoever to do with the annihilation of the soul of the wicked.

Also, annihilationists believe *abad* verifies their assertions in Psalm 143:12, which says, “And in Thy lovingkindness cut off my enemies, and destroy (*abad*) all those who afflict my soul; For I am Thy servant.” Again, as with all their linguistic arguments, the context proves their position to be false, and thus, unbelievable. In context, this psalm of imprecation is a plea for the all-powerful God to help the weak and helpless servant by doing away with all of his enemies and those who threaten him. This is not a reference to the annihilation of the soul in hell, but the physical death of the enemy, which according to the psalmist, is an act of God’s lovingkindness.

The same is true for the New Testament uses of the various forms of the words translated “destroy” or “destruction.” The 12 Greek words that annihilationists claim denote annihilation refer to anything from “ruined” wineskins (Matt. 9:17), to “lost” sheep (Matt. 15:24), to “spoiled” food (John 6:27). However, as we will see, the annihilation of the soul cannot be proved from any New Testament passage.

The Greek word for destruction, *apollumi*, is believed by the annihilationists to refer to the total destruction of the soul in such passages as Matthew 10:28, which says, “”And 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.” Again, an examination of the context proves that annihilation is not taught in this passage. This is a contrast between two types of fear: the fear of men and the fear of God. Men can destroy the body only, and therefore are not to be feared. However, God, in His omnipotence, has the ability to destroy the body and soul. Theologian John Broadus comments on the meaning of “destroy” in this passage: “‘Destroy’ need not mean annihilation, but only ruin, perdition, the destruction of all that makes existence desirable.”⁵³

The use of the word destroy in this context can be illustrated in modern speech such as “The Panthers destroyed the 49ers last Sunday!” It refers to the defeat and ruin of the 49ers, not the total annihilation of their existence. This passage is teaching that it is “much more important that we avoid God’s displeasure, than that of our fellow man.”⁵⁴ Concerning the contextual use of the New Testament words for “destroy,” Morey accurately concludes that “an exegetical examination of the texts where these words are found reveals they cannot be arbitrarily defined as annihilationism.”⁵⁵

Furthermore, the words translated into various forms of “perish” are found 146 times in the New King James Version. There are eleven Hebrew words and ten Greek words which are translated as “perish.”⁵⁶ The main word, *abad*, is the same word translated “destroy” and, as we

⁵³ John Broadus, *Commentary on Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), 230.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*, 109.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 110

have seen above, it is erroneous to assume that it means annihilation. Other Old Testament words translated into a form of the word “perish” mean various things such as being “enslaved” (Jer. 48:42), girdles and vessels being “ruined” (Jer. 13:7, 18:4), the physical death of the wicked (Prov. 11:10), or “cutting” a covenant or “cutting” timber to build the temple (Gen. 15:18, 1 Kings 5:6). None teach annihilation of the soul.

New Testament words translated into a form of the word “perish” mean anything from a grain of wheat which “dies” (John 12:24), to things which are “corrupted” by moth and rust (Matt. 6:19-20), to a “corrupt” mind (2 Tim. 3:8). In the New Testament as well as the Old Testament, like the words translated into a form of “destroy,” none of the words translated into a form of the word “perish” in context mean annihilation.

The same is true for the words translated into a form of the word “consume.” These include twenty different Hebrew words and three different Greek words. None mean or refer to annihilation. For instance, in the Old Testament, the words can denote the flies “devouring” the Egyptians (Ps. 78:45), skin that is “made old” (Lam. 3:4), or walls being “consumed” by hailstones (Ezek. 13:13). Again, in no case is annihilation the meaning of the word in the passage. Annihilation is nowhere to be found.

The New Testament pattern for the words translated “consume” is exactly the same. The annihilationists claim that the unquenchable fire of hell “consumes,” or totally destroys, the wicked. This seems to be a reasonable point if you assume that “consume” means annihilation, but looking at the context of the unquenchable fire and the forever rising smoke in Revelation 14:11 exposes this reasoning as flawed. Revelation 14:9-11 states that,

If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall 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 ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.

Annihilationists claim that the smoke ascending forever proves that the wicked were consumed by the fire, which naturally consumes that which is placed into it. However, notice the very next phrase – “and they have no rest day or night.” This is an indication that the torment is continual, ongoing, conscious torment. The wicked are not consumed or annihilated as Stott and company claim, for that would be a break or a “rest” from the torment of the fire! Furthermore, the torment is said to take place “in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.” To be annihilated into non-existence is to be taken out of the presence of everyone – the completely annihilated have no “presence” – therefore this torment cannot be referring to annihilation. If one wants to remain faithful to the Scripture which “cannot be broken” (John 10:35), one must concede that the torment spoken of in this passage is never-ending, conscious torment. It can be argued that the wicked, at that point, would certainly welcome annihilation.

The conclusion is obvious. Once the basic linguistic assumption of the annihilationists (*viz.* that these key words mean annihilation) is annihilated their linguistic arguments are annihilated

too. In no case in the Old or New Testaments do any of these words, in context, refer to the soul being annihilated, that is, going into nonexistence. Like the moral arguments, the linguistic arguments are simply not valid.

Answering the Exegetical Arguments

The linguistic presupposition of annihilationists also influences their exegesis of the passages which refer to hell. This leads them to the conclusion that unbelievers are annihilated and that the traditional doctrine of hell is immoral and unjust. However, as with their moral and linguistic assertions, the exegetical conclusions are also inaccurate. The following section is an examination of Pinnock's arguments concerning passages in the Old Testament, sayings of Jesus, the writings of Paul and other New Testament writers. I will attempt to show the error of Pinnock's conclusions, which are derived from textual eisegesis, or "reading into the text what the reader wants to say."⁵⁷

Old Testament. Pinnock's exegesis of Psalm 37 and Malachi 4:1-2 leads him to believe that the Old Testament teaches annihilation. However, his exegesis proves to be faulty. Psalm 37 is a psalm about dwelling in the Promised Land, trusting and obeying the Lord in the midst of the prospering wicked. It cannot be over-emphasized that the language in the Psalms is poetic, and therefore, often figurative. Psalm 37:2 states of the wicked, "For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, And wither as the green herb." This has nothing to do with the eternal destiny of the wicked, rather it is a statement that even though they now seem to prosper, God will soon extract them from the land which has been promised to Israel, whether by actively killing them (2a) or by their eventual physical death (2b). Even the annihilationists would agree that annihilation is not a slow, withering process as spoken of in 37:2b. Therefore, it is incorrect to believe that verse 2 speaks of annihilation.

Pinnock then moves to Psalm 37:9-10 to make his point. The text states that "For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more." Again, this is speaking, not of the eternal destiny of the wicked in hell, but their removal from the land. These verses contrast the wicked, who will be cut off from God's blessing, and the righteous, who will inherit the earth and shall not see the wicked prosper any more. The wicked will disappear from the view of the righteous and the righteous will live undisturbed. This passage refers to the *earthly* destiny of the wicked, not once mentioning the eternal destiny of the wicked. Therefore, verses 9-10 cannot support annihilationism as Pinnock claims.

Pinnock also claims Psalm 37:20 speaks of annihilation. However, look closely at the context (18-20):

The LORD knows the days of the upright, And their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. But the

⁵⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 45.

wicked shall perish; And the enemies of the LORD, like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away.

This is clearly speaking of God's preservation of the righteous in times of famine and His elimination of the wicked in the famine. Again, Pinnock's exegesis is unsatisfactory.

Malachi 4:1-2 is also cited by Pinnock as an annihilation passage. This passage also uses figurative language to refer to the wicked. It claims that because of divine punishment they will be left with "neither root nor branch." This means that none of the wicked will escape the judgment of God. Certainly, the wicked are not literal roots or branches, neither is their punishment a literal burning down to "stubble" or nothingness. Furthermore, this passage is another comparison between the wicked and the righteous, showing that the same "Sun" which punishes the wicked also makes the righteous glad. Again, Pinnock fails to consider the context and linguistic factors present, viz. figurative language.

The Sayings of Jesus. We have already examined Jesus' saying of Matthew 10:28 and concluded that it does not teach annihilation. Yet, Pinnock offers more evidence that should be dealt with on an exegetical level. He offers passages such as Matthew 13:30ff as proof that Jesus taught annihilation. As above, a balanced exegesis of these verses reveals that Jesus did not teach annihilation.

First, Pinnock claims that Jesus, echoing the teaching of John the Baptist in Matt. 3:10-12, taught annihilation in Matt. 13:30 and 40-42, says of the tares (the wicked) that had grown among the wheat:

First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn. . . . Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

First, it must be noted that this is a parable which employs much figurative language. The wicked are not literal weeds and they are not stored in a literal barn for literal burning into nothingness. However, the passage is very clear that they will be severely punished at the end of the age. Notice however, that in verse 41 and 42, Jesus ceases with the figurative language to describe the wicked and calls them what they are – not tares, but those who are offensive and lawless. He also very plainly states the end of both the wicked and the righteous. While we see the wicked cast into a "furnace of fire" where there will be "wailing and gnashing of teeth," we also see that the "righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Broadus appropriately comments on the destiny of both:

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth departs from the image of consuming the tares, to introduce another thought of horror, and heighten the terrible picture. The use of various images for future punishment should prevent a crude literalism, and falls in with the important teaching that there will be degrees of punishment. But the images must be understood as representing something real. Reuss, with his rationalistic freedom, justly

remarks that the furnace and the gnashing of teeth stand in the same position as the shining glory of the righteous – both must be accepted as facts, or else both alike referred to the mere popular beliefs of the time; one cannot accept the Bible descriptions of heaven as representing realities, and reject those of hell.⁵⁸

Jesus was teaching of a literal, fiery, conscious torment in hell when He spoke in this passage. This is also true of all the other passages in which He spoke of hell. He never once affirmed that the unbeliever would be totally annihilated. Rather, he spoke of a hell being as eternal as heaven. In fact, in Matthew 25:46, commenting on the destiny of the sheep and goats, Jesus said, “And these (goats) will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous (sheep) into eternal life.” This passage clearly states that the punishment of hell is as eternal as the bliss of heaven. However, annihilationists claim that the effects of annihilation are eternal (i.e. the annihilated are gone forever), and that is what is meant by everlasting punishment. That is, the punishment, annihilation of the wicked man’s soul, is eternal but the actual punishing is not. But this is not correct.

First, punishment cannot, by definition, be anything but conscious punishment. A car, a book, or a computer cannot be tormented. By its very nature, punishment requires awareness. Gomes states:

The mere fact that the wicked are said to experience punishment proves two inescapable facts by the nature of the case: the existence of the one punished, and the conscious experience of the punishment. If either of these two are lacking, then punishment is not occurring.⁵⁹

Also, this passage says that this conscious punishment is eternal. Annihilationism or extinction of consciousness cannot be read into this passage because annihilation is a one time, instant event. In contrast, the Greek adjective *aiōnion* in this verse means “everlasting, without end.”⁶⁰ This same adjective is used of eternal life (Matt. 25:46) and our eternal God (1 Tim. 1:7; Rom. 16:26; Heb. 9:14). This means that the punishment in hell is as eternal as the believers life in heaven and as eternal as our eternal God.

The Writing of Paul and the other New Testament Writers. Pinnock cites several Pauline passages such as 1 Corinthians 3:17 and Philippians 1:28 as evidence of the annihilation, or “destruction,” of the soul. Pinnock is once again guilty of eisegesis – reading his view into these New Testament passages.

1 Corinthians 3:17 is a warning passage which states, “If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.” The temple, many commentators agree, is those who believe in Jesus – the Church. From other parts of the epistle,

⁵⁸ John Broadus, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishing Co., 1990), 303.

⁵⁹ Gomes, *The Annihilation of Hell*, Part Two, 11.

⁶⁰ Walter Bauer, William Arndt, Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 28

it appears that the false teachers among the Corinthian church taught unholy doctrines. Such teaching tended to defile, to contaminate, and destroy the church, which should be kept pure and holy for God. This passage is a warning that those who spread such false teaching and derision, which render the church of God unholy, bring destruction upon themselves. This destruction, I would argue, refers to the taking of the physical life of the false teacher. However, one lexicon lists this use of the word “destruction” as to “punish with eternal destruction.”⁶¹ But whether this punishment refers to the taking of the physical life or to the eternal punishing in hell, it certainly does not refer to the individual being annihilated. The term “suggests ruination, or perhaps, desecration in the context, but certainly not the idea of annihilation.”⁶² One would have to bring the preconceived conclusion of annihilation to the text in order see it anywhere in this text.

Furthermore, the punishment of those who “destroy” the “temple” is one that fits the crime – they are likewise “destroyed.” It must be noted that the Church will never be annihilated out of existence (Matt. 16:18), so it is reasonable to conclude that the destruction offered to the offender is not the annihilation of his soul, but strict, severe punishment.

Philippians 1:28 is another text offered by Pinnock as proof of annihilationism. It states:

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents – *which is a sign of destruction for them*, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.

The meaning of this passage is debated among evangelicals. Other, more plausible explanations have been exegeted from this passage by those who do not hold to annihilationism. The most likely meaning offered for this text is as follows: Because the Philippians were standing firm and not alarmed by their opponents, it could be interpreted as a sure sign that the opponents were likely to be defeated. The fearlessness of the church spoke to the hearts of the opposition, telling them that destruction and defeat were coming.

The destruction of the enemies of the God is a common theme throughout Scripture. Paul speaks of their doom in a parallel passage, 1 Thessalonians 1:9, telling us that they “shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” One author comments:

⁶¹ Ibid., 865. The only problem I have with the view that this destruction is eternal destruction is that it assumes that all false teachers are not Christians. This is not a view that can be proved from the Bible. The Bible clearly teaches that believers can fall into serious doctrinal error (Acts 20:29-30; Eph. 4:14; 1 Tim. 4:1ff; etc.). Furthermore, our Christian life experience teaches us that believers can fall into and teach serious doctrinal error. In fact, I contend that Pinnock and Stott are perfect examples of this principle at work. To be sure, they hold to a serious doctrinal error, but they are, nevertheless, believers who will spend eternity with the Lord. So, to say that this punishment is eternal destruction is unwarranted biblically because of the fact that Christians can, and do, fall into serious doctrinal error.

⁶² Larry Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News* (Wheaton: BridgePoint Books, 1992), 78.

“Everlasting annihilation” is an unlikely meaning for the words “everlasting destruction. . . . Moreover, does it make sense for Paul to depict unbelievers’ extinction as their being “shut out of the presence of the Lord”? Doesn’t their being shut out from his presence imply their existence? Paul has in mind an irreversible verdict of eternal nonfellowship with God. A person exists but remains excluded from God’s good presence.⁶³

In addition, the Greek word in this passage translated “destruction,” *apoleia*, is used 18 times in the New Testament. One commentator remarks on the use of the word:

Most instances have the intransitive meaning ‘ruin, destruction’, particularly in the sense of eternal perdition. In the Synoptics there is the way that leads to destruction (Mt. 7:13, *apoleia*; the opposite is *zoe*, ‘life’), while in Paul reference is made to the objects of God’s anger ready for destruction (Rom. 9:22). The end of the wicked is *apoleia* (Phil. 3:19), . . . the beast is said to go to destruction, an assertion that speaks not of a simple extinction of existence, but of an everlasting state of torment and death.⁶⁴

Other New Testament passages are quoted by Pinnock as supporting annihilation. Yet, when the passages are viewed in their proper context, it becomes clear that Pinnock has read his view of annihilation into the text.

For instance, he refers to Hebrews 10:39 and claims that it teaches annihilation. The text encourages the Hebrew Christians by saying, “But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.” The mere fact that this passage is exhorting believers is ample proof that it is not speaking of annihilation. The entire book of Hebrews makes it very clear that some believers were “shrinking back,” moving away from Christ in order to escape persecution. The preceding verse states, “but my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him” (10:38 NASB). The book of Hebrews has several strong passages warning the backsliding Hebrew Christians of the consequences of “shrinking back” from Christ (6:1-8; 10:26-39). One consequence is “destruction.” However, this “destruction” is not a reference to hell because salvation is an eternal gift that cannot be lost. The punishment of “destruction,” in context, is severe discipline from the Lord which can culminate in physical death for the disobedient Christian (10:27; 28; 6:8; cf. 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16).

Pinnock also refers to several passages in 2 Peter, which he claims teach annihilation. Again, we see Pinnock reading his view into the text. For instance, the “destruction of ungodly men” (3:7) and “swift destruction” of false teachers (2:1, 3) are seen by Pinnock as teaching annihilation. But a closer examination proves this is not the case. In 2:1, we see Peter comparing the false prophets of his day to the false prophets of the Old Testament. He adds that for their incorrect teaching they will experience “swift destruction.” A comparison of Old and New

⁶³ Robert Peterson, *Hell On Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1995), 163.

⁶⁴ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 156-57.

Testament false prophets is the key to the passage. We see that the standard of accuracy for the Old Testament prophet was 100% accuracy 100% of the time. Deuteronomy 18:20 tells us the fate of a false prophet, “But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die” (cf. 13:5; 18:22). With this in mind, Peter is setting the same standard for the New Testament false prophet – if he prophesies falsely, God shall bring upon him “swift destruction,” which refers to the physical death of the false prophet.⁶⁵ It does not, however, refer to annihilation.

Furthermore, Pinnock points to 2 Peter 3:7 as a reference to annihilationism. This speaks of the day of judgment and destruction of the wicked. However, we have already seen above that the term “destruction” need not mean annihilation in any context. This one is no different. The destruction of the wicked is to “be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess. 1:9). It is a banishment from the presence of the Lord for all eternity.

Pinnock’s exegesis is full of problems, the greatest of which is that he is letting his theology dictate the meaning of the text instead of letting the meaning of the text dictate his theology. He fails to grasp the plain teachings on the subject of hell, which lead the “fair person” to see that hell is a place of conscious, eternal torment away from the presence of God.

CONCLUSION

Pinnock and Stott’s attempt to disprove the doctrine of eternal, literal hell has not accomplished its goal. Their moral, linguistic, and exegetical arguments for the doctrine of annihilation all fall to the ground due to a lack of reason, lack of lexical evidence, and a lack of good, solid exegesis. In short, Pinnock and Stott have failed to establish annihilationism as true.

Moreover, due to the grievous trends in modern theology, the defense of the traditional doctrine of hell must continually be presented. Keep in mind that it was Jesus Christ Himself, more than any other teacher, who taught the doctrine of everlasting, conscious torment for those who do not believe the gospel. And Jesus, being God Incarnate, was certainly in a position to know about the eternal, conscious torment that is awaiting all of those who reject the witness of God in creation, conscience, and Christ. However, one need not experience this eternal

⁶⁵ The New Testament teaches that Christians can bring destruction upon themselves. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is writing to the church and telling them that because some of them had taken the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner, many of them had become weak, sick, or even died (11:30). Furthermore, the apostle John in his first epistle speaks of a sin unto death (1 John 5:16-17). Many expositors agree that this refers to a believer who lives a lifestyle of unrepentant sin which culminates with the premature death of the Christian. God simply punishes the unrepentant believer with the untimely termination of his physical life because of his sinful behavior, much like He did to the sinful Corinthians who sinfully took the Lord’s Supper.

This is certainly a sober warning to those of us who belong to Christ. God punishes the sin of His children. He chastens those whom He loves (Heb. 12:6). And if “The LORD will judge His people” (Heb. 10:30), we should all live a life of continual repentance and confession of sin. For, as the writer of the book of Hebrews point out to the Hebrew Christians who were tempted to fall back into their less persecuted Judaistic religion, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

punishment at all. Though Jesus did clearly indicate the horrendous destiny of those who reject Him, He also offered eternal life and peace with God to those who trust in Him for salvation. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16-17).