

An Examination of Edward Fudges' Assessment of the Church Fathers Concerning the Doctrine
of Hell
By Dr. Marvin Jones

Introduction

Today, I want to review the work of Edward Fudge as he investigates the Church Fathers. By way of definition, the Church Fathers are those pastors, apologist, and theologians who lived between the years of 100 AD to 650 AD. I think the rise of Islam in the same time period contributed to the demise of the Patristic period although many colleagues point to John of Damascus as the last Patristic Father.

The appeal to the Church Fathers is twofold: First, it is an appeal to the earliest sources we have for Christianity. The thought is that if one could understand the teachings of the earliest sources, that becomes a guide for the contemporary church to emulate. There is some truth in this issue. As Baptist we believe our faith is the same faith that the apostles were taught by Jesus Christ. This faith has been preserved for the faithful to emulate. The apostle Paul informed Christians to mimic him as he “mimicked Christ.” The only way to “mimic” someone is to do and practice what that person does and practices. The appeal to the Church Fathers is a means of “getting back” to the closest sources we have in order to mimic them for gospel and church purity.

The Second reason to appeal to the Church Fathers flows out of the Scriptural command to “teach faithful men who will be able to teach others” (2Tim 2.2). The same command is restated by Jude “to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints for all” (Jude 3). The oral communication of our faith is to be “passed on” to succeeding generations in the same way we received it...pure and undefiled by cultural, philosophical, and intellectual reasonings.

The appeal to the Church Fathers is to acknowledge their teachings in the areas of church practice and doctrinal beliefs. In my humble opinion, it is a valid approach to understand the faith practices of the Fathers. This is exactly why men such as Edward Fudge, Leroy Froom, Earl Ellis, and many build their contemporary theological foundation on the traditions of the Fathers (I state these men because I disagree with every-one of them but they are appealing to the Fathers for support). Those of us who study the Patristic era are trying to demonstrate solidarity with the past. If that can be accomplished (solidarity with earlier teachings) then one can claim they stand in the tradition of the faith that has been handed down to the saints.

Contemporary Problems with Patristic Appeals

I have been reading the Church Fathers for over twenty-five years. I have read authors who also read the Church Fathers. There is one thing I have noticed about the appeal to the Church Fathers; it is very selective. For example, no Evangelical historian I have read is a Champion of the Church Father, Origen. He believed in the pre-existence of souls. Therefore, most Patristic Scholars do not advocate his teachings as they were condemned in 553. Yet, Origen's teaching influenced The Cappadocian Fathers. Why is that important? Because many contemporary Patristic Scholars embrace The Cappadocians as part of the traditional faith! To embrace the ones who are influenced by Origen as doctrinally orthodox while condemning Origen seems to be a bogus approach to Patristics. I am not claiming nor advocating that Origen should be held in better regard. I am just simply stating my observations within the Evangelical usage of Patristics.

Allow me to give two examples concerning the problem of appealing to the Church Fathers. Prior to 325 AD there were two traditions on the person of Jesus Christ. Both positions were opposites and both appealed to the Church Fathers for lineage for acceptability. One was

the Arian hermeneutic and one was the Athanasian hermeneutic (there is more to it than this limited approach, but time nor need does not allow a thorough investigation).¹ The Arian hermeneutic claimed there was a time when the Son of God did not exist. In other words, Jesus Christ was not the eternal Logos. This hermeneutic appealed to the Scriptures (Proverbs 8:22) which stated that God called forth his Wisdom (Logos/Person of Christ). The Arians took this to mean that the Son was not eternal.

The Athanasian hermeneutic adhered to the position that the Son was eternal with the Father as they used Scripture (John 1.1) as an appeal. *Do you see this?* Both appealed to the Scriptures for the basis of belief and both appealed to the legacy to the Church Fathers as foundational for their theological system. At the end of the day, both were at a stalemate.

This battle raged until it was finally settled by the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. That council concluded that no longer would Arianism be considered a viable orthodox position that is recognized by Christianity. Should one embrace Arianism then they do so without acknowledgement of Christianity. Thus, Arianism was deemed heretical and not orthodox. This decision has consequences for the contemporary Christian that is hardly discussed. The modern-day Jehovah's Witnesses (JW's) embrace very *similar* doctrines of the ancient Arians. No one that I know of within modern Christianity accepts the JW's as a viable Christian church.

Yet, not one contemporary Patristic Scholar that I know of has debated or denounced the JW's as outside the stream of orthodoxy (I do hope I am proven wrong on this issue). The problem with acknowledging or denying the JW's as a part of orthodoxy is that current

¹There are historians who would disagree with me that Arianism was a "tradition." Regardless of nuance, Arianism was a theological position in the church that was widely held by many Church Fathers. I will also admit they embraced this position in varying degrees but nonetheless, it was a theological position that was diametrically opposite of the Athanasius' position.

theologians do not give consideration to the earlier historical and theological positions of the church.

It is quite possible to have two differing traditions within the church (then and now) claiming Patristic lineage and both being accepted but without having reference to an earlier era. This makes appealing to the Fathers difficult as it forces current arguments onto them that may or may not have validity. This is typically called anachronism.

Should the Church Historian and/or Theologian denounce JW's because of their similarity with Arianism, it is conceivable that a claim of anachronism could be made. Yet, is making an appeal to the Nicene Creed valid for today's problem? I think that answer is "yes" even though it binds contemporary Christians to earlier decisions. Please remember, we are trying to adhere to the faith that was handed to us from the apostles.

The second problem with appealing to the Church Fathers and Tradition is that the concept of Tradition slowly moved into the same position as the Scriptures. In other words, by the medieval ages, Tradition did not simply interpret Scripture but became a revelation equal to Scripture. Not one Evangelical that I know of accepts this premise but that concept is acceptable in certain churches. So, appealing to the Church Fathers is not a means of continuing revelation or learning new revelation from God, but serves contemporary Christianity as a means of assessing theological positions and ministries for coherency with the "Faith that was handed down" to us. Assessing and evaluating contemporary theological positions should be done regardless of the claim of anachronism that is associated with such an approach.

The Challenge per Edward Fudge

Now with the above as foundation, I will turn to the challenge presented by Dr. Edward Fudge. The man was an extensive author and proponent of the Annihilation position. He has

quoted the Fathers to suggest that his position is also the legacy of the early Christian Church. By claiming solidarity with the Fathers, Fudge presents the case that his views are according to the original faith that was handed down.

I want to acknowledge that one can read the Fathers and conclude that they were Conditionalists (the soul is not immortal and will not be granted life to live in hell for eternity- this is the annihilation position). I also want to acknowledge that one can read the very same Fathers and conclude they were Traditionalists (the soul is immortal and will live eternally in heaven or hell). The issue comes down to 1) hermeneutics, 2) theological content.

That brings me to my paper. My presentation will examine Fudge's book, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*,² to demonstrate that Fudge does not make a case for prominent Church Fathers being Conditionalists. My approach (methodology) is to review Fudges' understanding of the theological content of certain Church Fathers to show his work is suspect.

Fudge's work, *The Fire That Consumes*, provides five chapters on the Early Church supporting annihilationism, one chapter on the Middle Ages, four chapters from the Reformers to the contemporary church all describing the various peoples associated with those era's supporting conditionalism (annihilationism). To take Fudge at face value simply means that by 200 AD until now the Christian Church has continued to mis-read the Church Fathers, The Reformers, and current Evangelical scholarship. That is an incredible claim!

So, to understand Fudge's claims concerning the Church Fathers, I will review the following men: Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Tertullian, (and a quote from Basil and Arnobius).

²Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011).

Ignatius of Antioch

Fudge gives a concise background on Ignatius' martyrdom. After citing his execution, Fudge offers the explanation of Ignatius' writings to *the Ephesians, the Trallian's, the Magnesians, and the Smyrnaeans*. Fudge, quoting the *Letter to the Ephesians*, chapter 16:2 stating:

Do not err, my brethren. James 1:16 Those that corrupt families shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 If, then, those who do this as respects the flesh have suffered death, how much more shall this be the case with anyone who corrupts by wicked doctrine the faith of God, for which Jesus Christ was crucified! Such a one becoming defiled [in this way], shall go away into everlasting fire, and so shall every one that hearkens unto him.³

Fudge also quotes Ignatius *Letter to the Magnesians* chapter 5:1 saying: "Seeing, then, all things have an end, these two things are simultaneously set before us — death and life; and every one shall go unto his own place."⁴

Fudge addresses the *Letter to the Trallians* by quoting chapter 2. "For, since you are subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, you appear to me to live not after the manner of men, but according to Jesus Christ, who died for us, in order, **by believing in His death, you may escape from death.**"⁵

The goal of Dr. Fudge is to rightly declare that Ignatius understands the contrasting terms of life and death found in the Scriptures. Fudge attempts to prove that Ignatius is consistent in his understanding of the terms.

³Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 257 quoting Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians* 16.2.

⁴Ibid., 257 quoting Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Magnesians* 5.1.

⁵Ibid., 257 quoting Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Trallians*, 2.

This is where Fudge's argument gets interesting. Fudge makes some assumptions about Ignatius that cannot be substantiated. "Ignatius speaks of Jesus's death and the sinner's final death in the same sentence, *with no indication that the word has more than one meaning.*"⁶ If Fudge is correct in that the word *death* has only one meaning he does not apply his meaning consistently (I will say more about Fudge's interpretive scheme later). In other words, if the word *death* means *eventual annihilation* for the sinner then consistency demands Fudge to address the meaning of death when it pertains to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Should Fudge attempt to apply the same meaning to Jesus it would simply mean that Jesus Christ was annihilated by the cross never to live again. Fudge simply cannot live with this position. So, let's sum up Fudge's argument.

1). He adheres to the position that death means annihilation of the sinner. 2), He claims that in the same sentence the word "death" cannot have two meanings. 3) The sinner will die never to live again because God will annihilate him. He stops his argument on that note. Fudge does not apply the same meaning to the Lord for reasons already mentioned.

Fudge's refusal to apply his meaning consistently inadvertently means that he has undermined his own position. He knows that if he applies the meaning of annihilation to the Lord's death it would result in an unbiblical Christianity as there could be no possibility of a resurrection. Quite simply, Fudge is picking and choosing the application of meanings and this time it proved to be not only illogical but unbiblical. So, regardless, of the fact that he builds the case for the word *death* meaning *annihilation* and even though he says that Ignatius uses the word without a nuance of different meanings, Fudge cannot apply annihilation to the Lord's death at the cross.

⁶Ibid., 257.

It is clear that Ignatius never made such a claim. Fudge forces a meaning on the ancient author. Fudge simply will not be consistent in his argument and apply the meaning of death as annihilation to the death of Jesus Christ in Ignatius' writings.

Irenaeus

Fudge, along with Leroy Froom, depicts Irenaeus as embracing annihilationism. The famous quote from Irenaeus is *Against Heresies* Book V, chapter 27. Irenaeus states:

But separation from God is death, and separation from light is darkness; and separation from God consists in the loss of all the benefits which He has in store. Those, therefore, who cast away by apostasy these aforementioned things, being in fact destitute of all good, do experience every kind of punishment. God, however, does not punish them immediately of Himself, but that punishment falls upon them because they are destitute of all that is good. Now, good things are eternal and without end with God, and ***therefore the loss of these is also eternal and never-ending***. It is in this matter just as occurs in the case of a flood of light: those who have blinded themselves, or have been blinded by others, are ***forever deprived of the enjoyment of light***. It is not, [however], that the light has inflicted upon them the penalty of blindness, but it is that the blindness itself has brought calamity upon them: and therefore the Lord declared, He that believes in Me is not condemned, John 3:18-21 that is, is not separated from God, for he is united to God through faith. On the other hand, He says, He that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God; that is, he separated himself from God of his own accord.⁷

Irenaeus, when describing the loss of the good benefits that God offers via separation from Him, uses the words, *eternal*, *never ending*, and *forever deprived of enjoying light*. These words speak of an eternity, without end, when referring to the final destiny of lost people.

Yet Fudge concludes that the loss of benefits also includes the loss of existence. The problem is that Irenaeus does not address that particular issue. Again, to support his own conclusions, Fudge must assume a different meaning for the word *eternal*, *never ending*, and *forever deprived*. This is a classic case of reading into the text something that is not there. This occurs on two differing levels: First, Irenaeus does not address the issue of the loss of being for

⁷Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1:556).

the non-saved. He addresses “loss of benefits.” Fudge must conclude that the phrase “loss of benefits” also means “loss of existence.” There is no warrant in Irenaeus’ writings that justifies this conclusion. Second, the conflation of those two statements allowing differing definitions must take place in order to support a conclusion that is not warranted from the text. Fudge is misleading on his explanation of Irenaeus.

Froom, commenting on this same Irenaeus passage, in his chapter entitled, *Conditionalism in the Early Church*, basically follows the faulty logic of Fudge. Froom states, “The incorrigibly wicked are consigned to eternal punishment, which he explains, ends in complete cessation of being or existence; and this results in the end of all evil. This chastisement will be eternal in its effects (this begs the question of eternal *for whom* since Froom thinks annihilation is in view), because God’s benefits are eternal.”⁸

Froom goes on to summarize his understanding of Irenaeus’ argument. Froom writes, “His argument in a sentence, was this: To be deprived of the benefits of existence is the greatest punishment, and to be deprived of them forever is to suffer ‘eternal punishment.’”⁹ Froom’s summary is accurate, but his follow up interpretation is also misleading. Again, Froom states, “The incorrigible wicked are consigned to eternal punishment, which is cessation of being or existence... The chastisement of the wicked are eternal in its effects, because God’s benefits are eternal.”¹⁰

I am going to critique Froom just for a moment. The first issue is that Irenaeus never refers to the non-saved as being annihilated. Froom, in order to be consistent with his own

⁸Leroy E. Froom, “Conditionalism in the Early Church” in *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism*, eds., Chris M. Date, Gregory G. Stump, Joshua W. Anderson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 269.

⁹*Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 269.

position, is forced to redefine the meaning of *eternal punishment*. In his mind, the punishment is the annihilation of the person. Thus, the effect of the punishment is eternal. Meaning: that God will annihilate the person as a means of punishment. Problem with that: For one, is it not stated that way by Irenaeus. Taking Irenaeus at face value he writes of the person being eternally punished but never mentions annihilation. Froom forces that meaning onto Irenaeus's words.

The second problem is the confused writing of Froom. He conflates two separate issues into one. He stated that it is a benefit to be eternally annihilated. Really? For Whom? Does the lost person receive a benefit in his/her punishment? Is said benefit applicable for the redeemed? The concept of benefit is not explained by Froom. Any suggestion that annihilation is a benefit is left undefined.

A third problem with Froom is that he equates punishment, which is designed to be punitive, and annihilation, which terminates existence, as somewhat equivalent. He confuses the means of punishment with the effects of punishment and states they are the same. Where does Irenaeus state that the means of punishment are temporal? Again, Froom (along with Fudge) must make forced assumptions as to the meaning of Irenaeus. To be fair, I will admit that one can read Irenaeus' *Confessions* in 1.10.1 as positing eternal destruction to the wicked. However, one could also read the same text as eternal damnation.

Tertullian

Tertullian is a later church father who rightly belongs to the Apologist era (2nd century). The Apologist were those who defended the faith against heretical attacks upon Christianity. This alone makes Tertullian a worthy investigation as his writings not only defended Christianity but help to define Christianity amidst the challenges of heresy.

The Resurrection of the Flesh

Tertullian's book, *The Resurrection of the Flesh*, references the *immortality of the soul* and the *eternal killing of the soul*. Fudge quotes Chapter 35 stating the following:

If, therefore, any one shall violently suppose that the destruction of the soul and the flesh in hell amounts to a final annihilation of the two substances, and not to their penal treatment (as if they were to be consumed, not punished), *let him recollect that the fire of hell is eternal— expressly announced as an everlasting penalty*; and let him then admit that it is from this circumstance that this never-ending killing is more formidable than a merely human murder, which is only temporal.¹¹

Tertullian is commenting on Matthew 10:28 which states, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Tertullian comments earlier on Matthew 10:28 that

Here, then, we have a recognition of the natural immortality of the soul, which cannot be killed by men; and of the mortality of the body, which may be killed: *whence we learn* that the resurrection of the dead is a resurrection of the flesh; for unless it were raised again, it would be impossible for the flesh to be killed in hell (why because it is not raised)...For since both substances are set before us (in this passage, which affirms) that body and soul are destroyed in hell, a distinction is obviously made between the two; and we are left to understand the body to be that which is tangible to us, that is, the flesh, which, as it will be destroyed in hell—since it did not rather fear being destroyed by God—so also will it be restored to life eternal, since it preferred to be killed by human hands.¹²

Tertullian is making a strong argument that there is distinction between the body and soul. The body is corruptible or mortal, whereas, the soul is incorruptible or immortal.

¹¹Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 269 quoting Tertullian, *The Resurrection of the Flesh*, ANCL 15:276.

¹²Tertullian, *The Resurrection of the Flesh*, ANCL 15:276.

Summary of Resurrection of the Flesh

Tertullian's argument is predicated upon a natural reading of Matthew 10:28. He does not eisegete the Scriptures which means he does not read a preconceived meaning into them. He reads them with a plain sense of meaning. He builds his argument on the same premise.

First, he states that the body is mortal (nothing wrong there). The flesh can be destroyed by humanity, sickness, or violent but natural means (tornado, flood, fire, etc.). His second point is that the soul cannot be destroyed because it is immortal. That is the soul lives on after the death of the flesh. The third point is that God must raise the flesh in order to fulfill the meaning of Matt 10:28. If God does not raise the flesh it would be impossible to "kill the flesh in hell." The basis of the unbeliever's judgment by the Lord is the resurrection of the unbelieving dead. If this were not the case the soul, if mortal, is either still alive after the death of the body which is a blow to Fudge or the soul also dies with the body. Fudge is unclear in his meaning on this issue. Suffice it to say that Tertullian does not adhere to this concept.

The fourth point is that Tertullian believes the contrast in Matthew 10:28 is exactly that the earthly body can be destroyed on earth but cannot be destroyed in hell by humans. Thus, one must fear God who is capable of destroying the body and soul in hell. If this were not Tertullian's point (or the Lord's) there is no sense in the warning as *kill* and *destroy* would be tantamount to the same concept. Thus, there would be no need for divine judgment making the warning invalid.

Notice how I phrased that last sentence. I did not argue against *kill* and *destroy* being synonyms. The argument I made about Tertullian (and I believe, the Lord's point) has to do with agency. The person who kills the body is the human. The point is *why* be afraid of humans. They cannot kill the soul only the body. This strongly refers to the eternality of the soul. If they cannot

kill the soul then the soul must be immortal. Why does this follow a logical pattern? The warning itself. Who can destroy the soul? Only God can do that.

Jones, how does this not argue for annihilationism? Are you playing into the hands of the conditionalist? Not so fast my friend. To say that the soul is annihilated in *hell* makes the punishment (penal) aspect of sin finite. It also makes *hell* finite. But Matthew 10:28 seems to be arguing for punishment as being eternal and the reward of eternal heaven for the righteous. Unless that is true there is no need for a warning. Why the warning for finite punishment? It does not make sense!

Per Fudge, damned spirits would undergo conscience torment for a time but then they are annihilated and so their punishment is finite. They have no being. This begs the question of the atonement. If sin is finite then the atonement should also be finite.¹³ Yet, the saints are to enjoy eternal life in Matthew 10:28. This is a process a duration. Let me be pointed here: Fudge has to argue that those receiving punishment are annihilated. He does not address the saints? He does not labor over heaven as a concise action or duration. Fudge will not argue the same approach concerning heaven even though the prepositional phrases seem to be parallel. This fact alone makes his argument suspect.

For that matter, Fudge, knowing that the redeemed are also referenced in Matt 10:28, does not address the infinite sacrifice for finite sins. Why? If sin is finite then a creature could atone for sin which is the process of the Old Testament. Fudge cannot allow for this but he does not address it either. He will not address the atonement as he only argues that the penalty for rejection of grace is finite while the payment for sin was infinite. The conclusion is that we are

¹³This argument was given to me by Dr. Tony Byrne of *Theological Meditations*.

left with an infinite payment for the atonement for the redeemed but a finite penalty for the sinner.

One last issues, Fudge claims that non-conditionalist will not review Matthew 10:28 thoroughly.¹⁴ Fudge argues that non-conditionalist want to make *destroy* mean *alive*. He writes, “We see in Matthew’s account, Jesus equates ‘kill’ and ‘destroy,’ making them interchangeable. That is not surprising to the ordinary person in normal discourse, but it flies in the face of traditionalists (another word for non-conditionalists) who always define ‘destroy’ as alive but wishing not to be.”¹⁵

Yet, Fudge knows Tertullian’s argument very well. He even admits that Tertullian understands the meaning of Matthew 10:28 as contrasting the temporal earthly body with the eternal body located in hell. Fudge writes, “If the souls of even the wicked people are immortal and are destined to live forever, and if earthly sin will be punished by what the Bible calls ‘eternal fire,’ the only conclusion Tertullian can reach is that the wicked will endure conscious unending torment.”¹⁶

The interesting issue with Fudge is that, regardless of his crediting Tertullian for presenting a consistent position, he critiques him as not understanding Matthew 10:28. Fudge states that if Tertullian is to be understood as embracing eternal conscience torment in hell he must not take Matthew 10:28 literally.

Fudge accuses Tertullian of denying the literal meaning of the Scriptures! It’s an incredible claim. Tertullian, per Fudge, is the one who is wrong on the issue but Fudge never

¹⁴Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 123.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 269.

considers that it is he that is wrong and Tertullian is making the case for *eternal hell* based upon an intact *Tradition* by embracing the plain meaning of Scripture (*Tradition* and *Scripture* plays into these meanings but time forbids me to review that concept).

Apology

Tertullian's *Apology* was written to give a defense of Christianity and a defense of individual Christians. Tertullian believed that Christians should be given equal status as other religions concerning Roman law. In the work he addresses the current philosophers' opinion of eternity. In Chapter 45 Tertullian states that:

No doubt about it, we, who receive our awards under the judgment of an all-seeing God, and who look forward to *eternal punishment* from Him for sin — we alone make real effort to attain a blameless life, under the influence of our ampler knowledge, the impossibility of concealment, and the greatness of the threatened torment, *not merely long-enduring but everlasting*, fearing Him, whom he too should fear who the fearing judges, — even God, I mean, and not the proconsul.¹⁷

Tertullian uses the expression eternal punishment and defines the meaning...*it is not merely long enduring but everlasting*. I have read and re-read Tertullian on this issue. There is no other way to read Tertullian with any significant meaning.

Fudge is mis-representing Tertullian by stating that Tertullian believes in the immortality of the soul to the extent that the soul does not need to be saved. Let me give Fudge a pass in one area and critique him hard in another. Perhaps Tertullian does believe that the soul does not need salvation but only the body is redeemed. There is the pass. Now the critique.

Fudge slips in another issue and conflates it with the argument against conditionalism. This is the old *bait and switch* move. He cannot prove that Tertullian is a conditionalist. He does

¹⁷Tertullian, *The Apology* (Ante-Nicene Fathers, 3:50).

not admit this so he condemns Tertullian, using Henry Constable as ammunition, to state that that Tertullian is “hedging” and using “equivocation” of language.¹⁸

Regardless, Fudge is being academically and morally dishonest. No matter how hard he tries, Fudge cannot make Tertullian a conditionalist. So he condemns him in another theological area which justifies Fudge’s judgement of Tertullian as being “a man of extremes.”¹⁹

In order for you not to miss this I am going to be direct: Fudge changes the topic in his writings on Tertullian. He moves from *eternal damnation* to Tertullian’s concept of *salvation*. Fudge is trying to show that if Tertullian is wrong in one area (salvation) then he must be wrong in another which is eternal damnation. This is a logical fallacy known as *Irrelevant Conclusion* but known more popularly as *The Red-Herring* argument.

The “irrelevant conclusion” or “red-herring” argument is when a deliberate attempt is made to change the subject or divert the argument from the real question at issue to some side-point. Fudge shifts the argument from *annihilation* to Tertullian’s position on *soteriology*, uses an ancient work by Henry Constable for ammunition, to condemn Tertullian as having extreme views.

Fudge does not review Chapter 47 of Tertullian’s *Apology*.²⁰ The reason is simple it gives a statement about eternal damnation that contradicts Fudge’s position. Chapter 47 gives better insight into Fudge’s premise that through Tertullian, *Plato joined the Church*.²¹

Fudge claims that Tertullian brought Platonic philosophy into the church and thus the meaning of the *immortality of the soul* was introduced. There is much to question on how much

¹⁸Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 270.

¹⁹Ibid., 268.

²⁰Tertullian, *The Apology* (Ante-Nicene Fathers, 3:51-2).

²¹Edward William Fudge, *Hell: A Final Word* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2012), 152-53.

platonic thought impacted Tertullian. This needs to be heavily considered in lieu of the fact that Tertullian had embraced Montanism. The theological concept of Montanism is moral rigidity of the person.

The fact that Fudge credits Tertullian with introducing platonic philosophy and shifting the theological focus of the church away from conditionalism is the logical fallacy known as a *False-Cause* argument. There is no such proof that Tertullian is responsible for moving the church away from conditionalism. How can I be certain? The argument is also guilty of *Affirming the Consequent* as the argument itself assumes that conditionalism was the normal and accepted theological position.

Fudge assumes that Tertullian is responsible for the church embracing *eternal damnation* because of his background in philosophy. Fudge's premise allows him to connect theological dots from Tertullian, to Clement and Origen, then to Augustine, on to Anselm to the Reformers even to American Christianity.²² If this argument were true, then we would have no option but to conclude that Christianity has been deceived for 2000 years!

Thankfully, Tertullian gives insight into the relationship between philosophy and theology in Chapter 47. Listen to what Tertullian said about philosophy and their position on eternity.

What poet or sophist has not drunk at the *fountain of the prophets? (The OT)*). Thence, accordingly, the philosophers watered their arid minds, so that it is *the things they have from us* which bring us into comparison with them. For this reason, I imagine, philosophy was banished by certain states — I mean by the Thebans, by the Spartans also, and the Argives — *its disciples sought to imitate our doctrines*; and ambitious, as I have said, of glory and eloquence alone, if they fell upon anything in the collection of sacred Scriptures which displeased them, in their own peculiar style of research, they perverted it to serve their purpose: for they had no adequate faith in their divinity to keep them from changing them, nor had they any sufficient understanding of them, either, as being still at the time under veil — even obscure to the Jews themselves, whose peculiar possession they seemed to be. For so, too, if the truth was distinguished by its simplicity, the more on that account the

²²Fudge, *Final Word*, 152-57.

fastidiousness of man, too proud to believe, set to altering it; so that *even what they found certain they made uncertain by their admixtures*. Finding a simple revelation of God, they proceeded to dispute about Him, not as He had revealed to them, but turned aside to debate about His properties, His nature, His abode.²³

I have no problem if someone says that Tertullian did try to integrate philosophy with theology. I think that is a correct statement concerning Tertullian. My problem lies in the fact that Fudge assumes that Tertullian embraced philosophic reasoning as an authority above the Scriptures. This premise has not been proven. In fact, Tertullian counters this approach by stating philosophy learned its content from the Scriptures.

From this short review, it is hard for Fudge to make the case that conditionalism or annihilationism was a widely accepted doctrine within the Church Fathers. No doubt some did embrace it but the question of how wide spread is very conclusive. *It was not an accepted doctrine by the majority*. I wish there was more time to comment on Justin Martyr but there is not.

The Strange Statement of Basil The Great

Basil of Caesarea is known as a Cappadocian Father. He is also known as Basil the Great. His work on the Trinity is nothing less than brilliant. He was born in 329 and began his ministry in the late 350's. He died in 379 at the age of 49 or 50 years old. His ministry lasted only twenty years but he impacted not only the ancient country of Turkey but Christianity as a whole.

Basil's work, *Rules Briefly Treated*, deals with the subject of everlasting punishment and he raises the question "does everlasting punishment end?" He states:

In one place the Lord declares that "these shall go to eternal punishment" (Mt. 25:46), and in another place He sends some "to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt. 25:41); and speaks elsewhere of the fire of gehenna, specifying that it is a place "where their worm dies not, and the fire is not extinguished" (Mk. 9:44-49) and even of old and through the Prophet it was foretold of some that "their worm will not die, nor will their fire be extinguished" (Isa. 66:24).

²³Tertullian, *The Apology* (Ante-Nicene Fathers, 3:51-2).

Although these and the like declarations are to be found in numerous places of divinely inspired Scripture, *it is one of the artifices of the devil*, that many forgetting these and other such statements and utterances of the Lord, ascribe an end to punishment, *so that they can sin the more boldly. If, however, there were going to be an end of eternal punishment, there would likewise be an end to eternal life. If we cannot conceive of an end to that life, how are we to suppose there will be an end to eternal punishment? The qualification of “eternal” is ascribed equally to both of them.* “For these are going,” He says, “into eternal punishment; the just, however, into eternal life.” (Mt. 25:46) If we profess these things we must recognize that the “he shall be flogged with many stripes” and the “he shall be flogged with few stripes” refer not to an end but to a distinction of punishment. (*Rules Briefly Treated* 267) ²⁴

This quote is interesting in that Basil, right or wrong, attributes the misunderstanding of the Scriptural teaching of annihilationism to Satan. His dates are also revealing and do shed light on his contempt for this doctrine. He attributed Arianism to the work of Satan as they misinterpreted the Scriptures. In his mind, the Holy Spirit would not lead Christians to embrace a false conclusion about God (see my writings on this issue).

Basil’s claim is based upon the Greek construction of Matthew 25:46. The word “eternal” is applied to two different people but indicates their eternal abodes. To state that the lost person will be annihilated must mean Satan influenced the interpretation of the people who are eternally damned. Basil sees this as a Satanic attack upon the Scriptures.

Another interesting feature is that Basil is a pastor-theologian. In this work, he is writing as a monastic reformer. Yet he comments on annihilationism from a pastor’s view point. He states that the doctrine allows one to sin more boldly. The one who sins more will receive more punishment. This argues for a process not a punctiliar action. How can God destroy a soul with more or less intensity? Fudges argument does not make sense.

The meaning of flogging with *many stripes* or *fewer stripes* refers to the type of punishment received not an ending to the punishment. The one receiving many stripes incurred

²⁴Basil, Rules Briefly Treated, 267.

more wrath because of the more sins committed. Obviously, the concept of *duration of punishment* is in mind along with the *quantity* of one's punishment.

The Strange Case of Arnobius

Basil's strange statement leads us to the strange case of Arnobius of Sicca. I, you, and the rest of the watching world can definitely say that Arnobius was a conditionalist. He taught the mortality of the soul, the need for redemption, and the consequences of rejecting divine grace.

The conditional nature of the soul meant, for Arnobius, that the soul must have redemption or annihilation awaited the lost. Arnobius seems to have rejected the biblical doctrine of the immortality of the soul as for him it seems more platonic than Christian. However, Earl Ellis thinks that Arnobius is more platonic than Fudge.

Dr. Ellis comments on the work of Arnobius and comes to a vastly different conclusion than Fudge. Ellis states, "Both Arnobius and Athanasius build their arguments more on philosophy than on biblical foundation."²⁵ This is a significant issue as Fudge argues that the conditionalist position is biblical. Ellis seems to think that the conditionalist position of the *Church Fathers* is built upon a philosophical framework.

Please note that Ellis is no friend to the Traditionalist (who claims the soul is immortal and will spend eternity in heaven or hell). Yet instead of stating that the Fathers, who embrace conditional mortality are biblical, Ellis states the opposite. Whereas Fudge argues that conditional mortality was always a NT doctrine and tries to make the case that Tertullian changed the theological concept of *hell*, Ellis states that it is philosophy that actually is the foundation for conditionalism. Ellis' statement seems to square with Tertullian.

²⁵E. Earle Ellis, "New Testament Teaching on Hell" in *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism*, eds., Chris M. Date, Gregory G. Stump, Joshua W. Anderson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 122.

Now back to Arnobius: I actually respect him for standing against the current. He does reject the biblical doctrine of the immortality of the soul and he is not afraid to state his reasons. Arnobius writes, “But what man does not see that that which is immortal, which is simple (not a unity of soul and body), cannot be subject to any pain; that that, on the contrary, cannot be immortal which does suffer pain?”²⁶ His point is the soul does not undergo pain.

Arnobius knows of mental anguish, depression, and mind body problems. I will not argue that these problems are from the soul but they cannot be of the body either. They seem to be mental or emotional. The mind may not function well but the body may function fine. The reverse is also true mentally a body may not function well but mentally one can (i.e. Stephen Hawking is a great example). Many athletes attest to this. When they retire most athletes will say they can still mentally play the game but their body will not allow such activity. The bottom line for me with Arnobius is that I need more information on him, before I can assess his work. Suffice it to say he is a conditionalist.

The Fate of Arnobius

Arnobius’ writings were condemned as heretical; not once but twice. The Second Council of Constantinople in 553 and the Lateran Council of 1513 banished his writings. The councils understood that Arnobius’ teachings were outside the bounds of orthodoxy.²⁷

One must remember that Arnobius died in 330. The death of Arnobius is significant as Robert W. Yarbrough comments on Arnobius. “In fact, even a source friendly to conditionalist

²⁶Arnobius, “Against the Heathen,” 2:14; accessed August 23 2019, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/06312.htm>.

²⁷Chris Morgan, “Annihilationism: Will the Unserved Be Punished Forever?” in *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, eds., Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 197. History and Historians are vague on the status of Arnobius and his writings being condemned at the Council of Constantinople of 553. There is no absolute proof of Arnobius or his writings being condemned at this council.

admits that it is not until Arnobius that we find ‘the first explicit defense of the annihilation of the ungodly souls in hell’ Moreover, ‘Arnobius is among the least biblical grounded early church fathers.’²⁸ Yarbrough understands that Arnobius to be the sole progenitor of annihilationism but it was such a weak view that it did not have a following in the early 300’s.

Robert Yarbrough’s quote actually refers to Arnobius as the one who introduced Annihilationism into Christianity. The condemnation of Arnobius also means that the whole of Christianity found his writings outside the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy. For that matter, The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church states:

Though this opinion had a solitary representative in the 4th century, African Christian author Arnobius, it was never held in Christendom until recent times, except in isolated cases of philosophical speculation, and it was formally condemned at the Fifth Lateran Council in 1553. In the 19th century, however, it found favor with many thinkers as a possible way of accounting for the fate of impenitently wicked without accepting either the orthodox doctrine of eternal punishment of the Origenistic theory of universalism... The teaching of the mortality of the soul is generally considered to be opposed to the Christian doctrine of man and to the dignity and responsibility of the human soul.”

The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church is the standard reference for Christian thinking. Even though Fudge and other claim legacy from various Church Fathers there is no evidence is supportive.

Another interesting quote is from B.B. Warfield. He states:

Some confusion has arisen, in tracing the history of the annihilationist theories, from confounding with them enunciations by the earlier Church Fathers of the essential Christian Doctrine that the soul is not self-existent, but owes, as its continuance in being, to the will of God. The earliest appearance of a genuinely annihilationist theory in extant Christian literature is to be found apparently in the African apologist Arnobius.” (I am indebted to Ronald Rothenberg for this quote).²⁹

²⁸Robert Yarbrough, “Jesus on Hell” in *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, eds., Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 85. Yarbrough is quoting ACUTE’s David Hilborn’s “The Nature of Hell” page 62.

²⁹Benjamin B. Warfield, “Studies in Theology,” vol. 9, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 451. I am indebted to Ronald Rothenberg for this quote.

Past Theologians recognize that the founder of annihilationism as Arnobius. It is not found within the Tradition of the Church Fathers.

For that matter, every major Creed and Confession produced by the Fathers treat Hell as eternal conscience torment. Just for the record, those of us that are Baptist and particularly Southern Baptist, annihilationism is outside the recognized Baptist Faith and Message, 2000. I am going to leave those thoughts with you.

Fudge and His Interpretive Problems

Conditionalist try to support their argument based upon a range of word meanings that are often secondary meanings instead of the basic primary definition. Case in point is the word “eternal” (Greek word is *aionios*). Both derivatives, αἰωνιος and αἰων, mean *eternal without beginning or ending* (BAGD). Fudge uses the word to indicate a finality of the process or as Chris Morgan states “a finality of consequences.”³⁰ Yet punishment requires conscience existence.³¹ For God to punish the body and soul (Matt 10:28) there has to be the resurrection of body united with the immortal soul. All of this indicates a process of judgment not a process to judgment.

This actually raises the second problem. Conditionalists know that the word “eternal” means without end. How can you argue for a finite ending for the body that has been raised to unite with the immortal soul? You cannot! Fudge hinges his argument on the morality of the

³⁰Morgan, “Annihilationism,” 202.

³¹Ibid., 203.

soul. Therefore, he and other conditionalist argue the meaning of eternal destruction is the effect of the punishment rather than the *process* of punishment.

There is an analogy that helps us to understand the process of punishing the wicked. When a convicted criminal receives a life sentence that means the process is punitive for the duration of his/her life. The criminal will never be free to harm society at large and can only harm the society of his/her confinement – if then. The conditionalist will argue that actually supports annihilation in that when the criminal dies the punishment ends.

Not so fast my friend. If the soul is eternal then punishment can never end which is the meaning of Matthew 10:28. The only reason for the Lord to raise the unbeliever's body is for punitive action. Keep in mind the body is already dead. For the Lord to destroy it a second time requires a resurrection. Most conditionalist will agree (if not all of them). Here is their problem: if the soul is mortal it must also be resurrected unless they defeat their own position by stating that the soul lives on past the body. If they do argue such then their argument is for the eternity of the soul. That denies their own position. If, in their view the soul lives beyond the death of the body then at one point does the soul demonstrate its mortality? Mortality means that an entity will die on its own. This is a hard issue to resolve for conditionalist.

For the above philosophical reasons, the Traditionalist contend that the soul is immortal and will be punished with the raised body. A biblical motif for this is seen in Genesis 3:22 where God acknowledged that a person can live forever in an unsaved body and soul. In that scenario God banished Adam and Eve “he could eat of the tree and live forever” so God banished them from his presence. This verse argues for a state of existence that knows no time limits. Quality is not the key here but duration is in view.

The use of the word “destroy” and “kill” are used by conditionalist to argue annihilation. The argument is the “destroy” and “kill” simply mean total destruction of the person. Conditionalist correctly state that punishment in the OT is often associated with complete extinction or annihilation. They are correct in that meaning.

Douglas Moo has argued that “destroy” and “kill” can also mean loss of function or loss of productivity. “What is destroyed is life as we know it in the world...but note that most evangelical annihilationist posit that unbelievers exist for some time after death—*so clearly they cannot argue that the language of destruction when applied to physical death means extinction.*”³² Then, of course, the argument for *extinction* after the unbeliever’s resurrection for punishment is just as difficult to make. The word does not take on a different meaning pending the status of the unbeliever. Again, conditionalist face a real philosophical and theological dilemma with this issue.

Moo goes not to argue that the meaning of destroy and kill can mean loss of function especially in view land that cannot yield fruit. The land is still there but it is so destroyed that it cannot produce vegetation that is sustainable for Life.³³ The point is that annihilation is not a required meaning of “destroy” and “kill” although that meaning is possible. It seems far better to take the meaning of “ruined” as it describes a state of existence, whereas, annihilation cannot be described as eternal in that it is instantaneous.³⁴

The last issue to address with Fudge is the fallacy of *Faulty Assumption*. When Fudge reads the various Church Fathers he reads them as Conditionalists. The reason for this is he also

³²Douglas Moo, “Paul on Hell” in *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, eds., Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 105.

³³*Ibid.*, 105.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 105.

reads them as rejecting the immortality of the soul. The faculty assumption is that if one has a view of conditional mortality that person must also be an annihilationist. That is not necessary a logical conclusion. Fudge has to infer that concept.

Conclusion

By and large the Church Fathers embraced the eternal conscience torment of Hell. It is Fudge who tries to argue that the shift occurred away from annihilationism to Eternal Conscience Torment. He often misreads the prominent Church Fathers in support of his position. This amounts to historical revisioning or re-writing history. Ronald Rothenberg states

With regard to the sub-loci of the nature of hell, while in 1995 David Moore held that universalism ‘has not yet made any significant inroads with evangelicalism,’ in 2004 Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson warned ‘with regard to two aberrations: universalism and annihilationism...that departure from received doctrine is now taking place from within the church and not only from without.’ Contrary to annihilationist Christopher M. Date who denies that a shift has occurred.³⁵

Fudge’s appeal to the Church Fathers is an attempt to prove that a theological shift of thinking has taken place. The survey of Ignatius, Irenaeus, and Tertullian confirm that these three influential men embraced the eternal conscience torment position. The writings really never waiver from the eternality of Hell as a process of punishment that endures forever.

³⁵Ronald Rothenberg, Unpublished paper 2019 quoting Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson “Introduction” to *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, eds., Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 11., and David Moore, *The Battle for Hell* (UPA, 1996), 1.