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A Biblical View of Hell

A Case for Conditional Immortality

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The Scope of this Paper

The aim of this paper is to highlight the scriptural backing for a conditional view of immortality or CI for short. It will focus on four main points: Scripture's view of immortality, key ideas of judgement in the Old Testament, an overview of Jesus' teachings on hell, and a summary of key verses in the New Testament which speak of hell.

This paper is built on the reformed idea of Sola Scriptura – that God is revealed through his word and our doctrine (orthodoxy) and practice (orthopraxy) must be built solely on Scripture. The paper will be respectful to tradition and comment on traditional views, but conclusions will be based on the wording in Scripture rather than the ideas of teachers and preachers. Bible translations are made with committees and scholars steeped in the original languages and this paper relies on their expertise and rendering of the language of the word of God accurately. Where some words are debated, some minor analysis may be made on the Greek or Hebrew or context provided within the overview of Scripture itself.

This paper will aim to highlight and critique the filters created by tradition and culture by which Scripture are often read. Two examples of filters would be: "sin against God, being a violation of infinite obligations, must be a crime infinitely heinous, and so deserving infinite punishment"¹ or "The good news is only as good as the bad news is bad."² These ideas are more philosophical and cultural than scriptural but there are many that use these ideas as a means of defending a view that scripture doesn't necessarily teach. Some ideas and doctrine are inferred from scripture, such as the trinity, rather than through explicit verses and chapters. This paper will aim to show that the two examples above are cultural inferences as opposed to scriptural ones.

Though many who have argued the case for Conditional Immortality have grouped words and phrases from various parts of Scripture together, the aim of this paper is to show the complete overview of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. This will highlight the connections between Old Testament and New Testament passages as well as the repetition of themes from beginning to end. These themes highlight that immortality is God's alone, death is the ultimate enemy and after judgement the wicked, death and the places that hold the dead will be destroyed in the lake of fire. The new heaven and new earth will contain no evil, no sin and no death and only the righteous will have eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

¹ (Edwards, *The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners*, 1734) Christopher D Marshall states as a response, "Arguably it is morally more repugnant to harm a weaker party than a stronger one. That the situation is different with an ontologically superior being – namely, God – must be simply asserted as self-evident; it cannot be logically proven. Similar problems exist with regarding every sin as equally meriting infinite punishment and with viewing all human wrongdoing as an intentional rejection of God's rule" (Date, Stump, & Anderson, 2014)

² The full quote is: "The good news is only as good as the bad news is bad, and in Scripture eternal happiness and everlasting joy are balanced against the alternative—eternal misery and everlasting anguish." (Koukl & Barnett, 2017) Though this paper will discuss why this isn't scriptural, it is also poor logic which is surprising from Greg Koukl, an excellent apologist. Is it true that you cannot enjoy good news without the bad? It is a strangely Karmic view of the world, not a biblical one.

A Language of Hell

Terms will be explained as they are used but the main views of hell are as follows.

Universalism

Universalism is the belief that hell is restorative. Though there are many sub-versions of Universalism, the main view is that those who are not immediately saved through Jesus will be refined in hell until they repent. Though not explicit, the line of questioning in Rob Bell's book *Love Wins* insinuates that all will be saved in the end³.

Eternal Conscious Torment

Eternal Conscious Torment or ECT is the most widely accepted view of hell. It is the belief that when those who do not believe in Jesus are resurrected and judged, they will be made immortal and endure being punished eternally in hell. They will be conscious while experiencing their punishment. It is often regarded as the 'traditional' view and will be referred to as such through this paper. Again, there are a few sub-versions of this teaching ranging from the literal fires and torment and torture by God's hand as taught by Jonathan Edwards⁴ and GotQuestions.org⁵ to the language of separation and self-torment as taught by CS Lewis.

Conditional Immortality

Annihilationism or Conditional Immortality is the view that only those who believe in Jesus receive immortality and eternal life, while those who do not are judged and are punished with death in hell. Hell is a place of destruction and all those who go into hell will be killed or destroyed. This view also has a few sub-versions and is often associated with 'liberal' or 'progressive' Christianity. It is also a view which is linked to those who are no longer orthodox and cults such as Jehovah's Witnesses. In this paper the term Conditional Immortality (CI) will be used as it highlights the core biblical argument against the traditional view, which will be discussed in the next section. The view also does not require the complete annihilation of the wicked for that person to be dead or destroyed (see discussion on Isaiah 66:24).

Summary of the three views

All three views believe in hell. It is debated within Christian circles which is a biblical view of hell, though in many circles, hell is rarely discussed at all. Opposing views should not assume others do not believe in hell. There are some who would argue the non-existence of hell but the weight of Scripture that will be looked at should create a formidable case against this view without addressing it directly. This will also be the case for Universalism. It is not within the scope of this paper to create a complete critique of ECT, Universalism or the non-existence of hell but to show the overarching view of Scripture with regards to CI.

Orthodoxy

The definition of orthodoxy as used in this paper is "a belief or way of thinking that is accepted as true or correct"⁶. Currently many assume that CI and Universalism are not orthodox and are to be avoided. There is also an assumption that those who hold these views are often at the start of a journey that leads to many other incorrect views surrounding Scripture. This paper aims to show that CI is an accurate and true understanding of Scripture and can be held by a Christian without fear of heresy.

³ (Bell, 2011)

⁴ (Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.* , 1741)

⁵ (GotQuestions.Org)

⁶ (Merriam-Webster, 2019)

Original words translated as “Hell”

Early English translations such as the King James Version translated four different Greek and Hebrew words as Hell. This has led many to assume that death leads to the wicked immediately heading to hell and the righteous immediately to heaven. This in turn leads to confusion around resurrection and judgement. This paper will aim to clarify the original terms further throughout the paper as they appear in Scripture. As a reference, Figure 1 gives a very brief overview of the four terms and what they were understood to have represented in culture of the time and Scripture.

SHEOL	HADES	TARTARUS	GEHENNA
Hebrew word referring to the destiny of the wicked and righteous alike after death and before judgement.	Greek word referring to the destiny of the wicked and righteous alike after death and before judgement. Seen as a Greek interpretation of Sheol. ⁷	Greek word from mythology accepted to be a “place of temporary holding, awaiting judgement”, usually for divine beings or enemies of the gods. ⁸ The biblical usage may be somewhat different (see discussion on 2 Peter).	A transliteration for the Valley of Hinnom located outside of Jerusalem. The valley was linked to war, child sacrifice and dead bodies (Jeremiah 7:29-34 and 19:1-15). With regards to punishment, see section on Jesus teaching and hell.

Figure 1: Original words translated as “Hell”⁹

Scripture

NIV – New International Version – this will be the default translation used though other versions will be referenced and quoted throughout the paper alongside Hebrew/Greek where it is debated. This will be the anglicised version.

ESV – English Standard Version

KJV – King James Version

NET2 – Second edition of the New English Translation

A Note on the Nature of God

God is holy (1 Samuel 2:2, Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8) and this is expressed well in Hebrews 12:18-29 but more specifically in verse 29 when the teacher states, “our God is a consuming fire.” Other aspects of God’s nature must be viewed in relation to and come from His holiness. God is love (1 John 4:8,16). God is just (2 Chronicles 12:6, 2 Thessalonians 1:6). God is merciful (Deuteronomy 4:31, Daniel 9:9, Luke 6:36, Ephesians 2:4). God is gracious, full of compassion and slow to anger (Psalm 116:5, Joel 2:13, 2 Chronicles 30:9) while also being a God who judges (1 Samuel 2:10, Psalm 75:7, Romans 2:16) and one whom we should fear (Ecclesiastes 8:12, 12:13, Revelation 14:7).

Whatever the final judgement, it will be consistent with God’s character. His wrath will be fearful, but it will be just and will demonstrate his mercy and love.

⁷ (Britannica E. o., 2019)

⁸ (Britannica T. E., n.d.)

⁹ (Nations, n.d.) Rival Nations website was the original source of this table though it has been edited heavily. It is debated as to whether Gehenna was a rubbish dump with unending fires, but it is recognised that it was a place where corpses and bodies were thrown at various points in history. Basil F.C Atkinson also discusses this in depth in his book *Life and Immortality* as does Kim Papaioannou in *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus*.

Immortality

“There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilisations - These are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.” CS Lewis¹⁰

“You are an embodied soul who will live forever in Heaven or in Hell, created in the image of God, unlike mere animals, and, as a Christian, bought with the blood of the Son of God, and indwelt by the very Spirit of God himself.” John Piper¹¹

Many preachers and Christian teachers have taught, even unintentionally, that all resurrected people will be immortal and live forever in one way or another. The teaching as seen by John Piper and CS Lewis, says that all souls and risen bodies will live forever in Heaven or Hell and that it is a person’s choice in this life as to where they will end up.

The quotes above are not the full theological understanding of man’s immortality but short snippets of popular evangelical teaching that hint at the idea that man is immortal in some form. The assumed immortality of mankind is argued to have come from the teaching of Plato¹² and this was then very persuasive to Jews¹³ and Christians alike. Wherever and whenever this concept was introduced, be it by Plato, Augustine or earlier, Scripture would seem to have an alternative perspective about humanity and immortality.

Much of the doctrine of immortality is built on inference from verses that seem to be related to eternal torment¹⁴ and external sources¹⁵. Two phrases in Scripture that are often used to support this idea are ‘created in the image of God’ and ‘breath of life’ in Genesis 1 and 2 and referenced lightly in statements like John Piper’s above. Genesis 1 and 2 talk about the creation of Adam and Eve. God creates man in his image and breathes the breath of life into them.

1:26-27: “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’

*27So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.”*

*2:7: “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a **living being (Hebrew: nephesh; KJV translates as soul; ESV translates as creature)”***

John Piper’s teaching is one example of many¹⁶ where the context connects “created in the image of God” with every soul and resurrection body being immortal. Piper says that an “embodied soul” will

¹⁰ (Lewis, 2001)

¹¹ (Piper, Hijacking Back Your Brain From Porn, 2013)

¹² (Plato, 2013)

¹³ (Arkush, n.d.)

¹⁴ These passages will be discussed later, see Matthew 25, Revelation 14 and Revelation 20.

¹⁵ (Potter, n.d.) Though many doctrines have a lot of scripture to provide a solid backing for them, the immortality of man is very much based on inference from various sources external to the bible as shown in the link here: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07687a.htm>

¹⁶ From Charles Spurgeon to Billy Graham to Mark Driscoll, all can be quoted as stating the all people will live forever in heaven or hell.

“live forever in heaven or hell”. It is unclear why this assumption is made from the context of the quote. There are many characteristics of God that are not part of a person’s experience or character, such as omnipotence and omniscience, so the characteristic of eternity/immortality being applied to humans seems arbitrary. John Piper does answer what it means to be made in the image of God elsewhere:

“God created us in his image so that we would display or reflect or communicate who he is, how great he is and what he is like. Here’s the picture in my mind. I was created like a mirror. And a mirror that was supposed to be 45 degrees with the clear reflective side pointing upward so that as God shone on it at the 45-degree angle, it would bounce off and it would make a 90 degree turn and be reflected out into the world. And at the fall Satan persuaded me that my image is more beautiful than God’s image and so I flip the mirror over. Now the black back side is towards God. It doesn’t reflect anything. Instead, the mirror casts a shadow in the shape of itself on the ground and I fell in love with the shadow. That is what happened. And we have been loving ourselves ever since.

And in salvation two things happen. The mirror gets turned around and we see the glory of God again and the defilement that had gone over the face of it gets wiped off gradually and we begin to reflect God. So, I think being created in the image of God means that we image God. We reflect God. We live in a way, we think in a way, we feel in a way, we speak in a way that calls attention to the brightness of the glory of God.”¹⁷

There is something about humanity that reflects who God is but does not absorb or gain all of God’s characteristics, though through faith in Jesus we may have access to more characteristics than without (1 Peter 1:1-15).

John Walton in his commentary on Genesis¹⁸ agrees but takes it a little further. Walton defines the image of God as that of a mirror but also that of a child being an image of their earthly father (based from Seth being the image of Adam in Gen 5:1-3). He goes on to suggest that:

“while a baby may be affirmed to be in the image of its father, few can recognise that image...the image grows more recognisable as the child matures. This does not essentially take place in a physical way, but rather in the way the child mirrors the attitudes, expressions, and character of his or her father... we likewise have the capacity to become more and more in the image of God.”

He references Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10 to show the scriptural support for this statement. Immortality is not in view.

In Genesis 2:7 the Hebrew word *nephesh* has been translated by the KJV as “soul” while other translations render it “creature” or “being”. It is a difficult word to translate as it has been translated in 45 different ways¹⁹. It may well be that this connection between the breath of life and man becoming a ‘soul’ that helped build a flimsy bridge for humanity to be immortalised. The issue with this interpretation is that *nephesh* is used to describe living *creatures* in Genesis 1:20,21 and 24. Genesis 2:7 does not teach that man is innately immortal.

¹⁷ (Piper, What Does It Mean to Be Made in God's Image?, 2013)

¹⁸ (Walton, 2001)

¹⁹ Edward Fudge quotes Atkinson’s *Life and Immortality* for this statistic. (Fudge, 2011)

It is important to clarify what “breath of life” is, or at least, the definition that will be used throughout this paper. Breath of life is a unique Hebrew phrase to Genesis 2:7 but it can be assumed that it simply means those who are alive²⁰ but not necessarily just humans. The flood account in Genesis 6 and 7 uses similar terms (though not the same in Hebrew despite being translated as ‘breath of life’) for all creatures that perish in the flood (6:17, 7:22). Immortality is not assumed for all creatures and so, the assumption that breath of life requires the human to be immortal is not reasonable.

Assumed immortality for humanity is foreign to the narrative of Genesis. In Genesis 2:17, the consequence of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is that Adam and Eve will surely die. They eat anyway, and so God expels them from the garden under the emphasis of 3:22:

“Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”.

Adam and Eve do not eat of the tree of life and they will not live forever. The passage suggests that without this fruit, humanity is expected to die. Genesis 3:19 defines death: *“for dust you are and to dust you will return”*. The breath of life will be removed from a person’s body and there will be an end. Ecclesiastes 12:7 emphasises this point stating the spirit will return to God. This is often read through the filter of body/soul dualism but the word for “spirit”, *ruwach*, is best translated as “spirit of God” or “breath of God”. Whatever it is God gives each human to make them alive is returned to him at the end.

The conclusion from Genesis 1-3 can be stated like this: Humanity cannot not live forever without intervention from God. Whether God does intervene and sustain both the righteous and the ungodly will be discussed over the next sections of the paper. This is true no matter the view one might hold with regards to the relationship between the body and soul.

There are other passages in the Old Testament that can be used to discuss immortality, but many will be looked at in relation to judgement and Hell in the next sections and so will not be repeated here. The next key Scriptures regarding immortality are in the New Testament.

Timothy is a book about doctrine. Paul writes about guarding the word of God and making sure to preach only that which is rooted in Scripture. In chapter 6, Paul urges Timothy to flee things that lead to evil and pursue righteousness, to grab hold of the eternal life to which he was called after Timothy made the confession that Jesus was Lord. Eternal life is a consequence of belief in Jesus. Eternal life is conditional on this confession, a condition that is emphasised in the section regarding Jesus’ teachings on Hell.

In verse 13 of chapter 6, Paul states that God “gives life to all things” a reminder of Genesis and God breathing life into all creatures. Verse 16 shows Paul directing Timothy to the glory that will be Jesus’ return and Jesus’ sovereignty *“who alone has immortality* (Greek transliterated: *athanasian*), *who dwells in unapproachable light”* ESV or *“who alone is immortal”* NIV. *Athanasian* appears only two other times and both are in 1 Corinthians 15 in consecutive verses 53 and 54:

“For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with athanasian. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with athanasian, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory””.

²⁰ John Walton makes this point in his NIV Application Commentary in Genesis as does Edward Fudge in *The Fire That Consumes*, and it is consistent with the themes of Genesis 1-3 as discussed here.

If we do not change the meaning of words, Paul is stating that humans are perishable and mortal. It is only through God's intervention that our perishable nature can be changed, and death can be defeated. Paul seems to make his view even more clear in his second letter to Timothy. In chapter 1 verse 10 Paul writes:

"But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality (Greek transliterated: aphtharsian) to light through the gospel".

Aphtharsian here is seen 7 more times and is translated immortality (Romans 2:7), imperishable (1 Cor 15:42, 50, 53, 54) and incorruptible (Ephesians 6:24).

Note that immortality and life is contrasted with death in 2 Timothy 1:10. These verses in Timothy together with Genesis highlight the understanding that immortality is conditional, rather than death being a state of consciousness in torment.

The conclusion from 1 and 2 Timothy, as well as 1 Corinthians is that immortality is not a default position for humanity in this life or the next. It is only through the appearing of Christ Jesus and the gospel that life and immortality are accessible. It is only accessed by believing in Jesus. Immortality is conditional on the giver of life sustaining his people by right relationship through Jesus. As this section started with Genesis and the expulsion of Adam and Eve away from the tree of life, it will conclude with reference to Revelation 2:7 and 22:14.

2:7: Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

22:14: Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

Only those who believe in Jesus, are victorious and are made clean will have access to the tree of life, giving them the ability to 'live forever'. Revelation 22:15 talks about those who do not have access to the tree of life, and that is where the next section begins.

Judgement in the Old Testament

Francis Chan states in chapter 2 of his book with Preston Sprinkle, *Erasing Hell*, that the OT says very little about Hell²¹. He then looks at the foundational beliefs of first century Jews with minimal interaction with the Old Testament. There are many aspects of CI that this paper can simply not cover and so two aspects of Old Testament themes will be discussed. The end of the wicked and the language of fire and worms. There are others that have covered these passages in far more detail²² and so this will simply remain an introduction to the passages.

The End of the Wicked

To remain succinct most Scriptures from the OT can be referenced in the table within this section and studied, though each will have a short summary as to why it is relevant to CI. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and more references can be found²³. Most of these Scriptures, when read without current cultural or traditional filters can be seen plainly to teach that those who are not faithful to God, to His law or seeking righteousness will face an end. This end involves judgement which leads to destruction and death.

Genesis 2:17

“but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

A note needs to be made here regarding the phrase “**in the day** (when in the NIV) that you eat of [the fruit] you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:17, ESV). Many who hold the traditional view of hell argue that because Adam and Eve did not die the instant that they ate the fruit, this must mean there is a distinction between death under sin (spiritual death) and death at the end of life (physical death). This distinction is important for the traditional view because this is used to argue that the second death (Revelation 20:10) is another form of spiritual death that can be an ongoing conscious existence. This argument is backed up with other passages in scripture such as Ephesians 2:1 and Colossians 2:13 that those who are alive now but not in Christ are living in a type of spiritual death. To use this idea with Genesis 2:17 is an inaccurate understanding of the Hebrew as John Walton points out in his commentary on Genesis²⁴. Walton points to the use of the same phrase in Jeremiah 26:8 and its explanation in Jeremiah 26:11 that the eventual outcome of the behaviour will be death. This is not an immediate doom, nor some form of spiritual death but a sentence passed that will be carried out in the future. Sin therefore passes a sentence on those who are under it that they are doomed to die. This can also make sense of the various Pauline references that hint at a death before coming to Christ who removes this death sentence from us.

²¹ (Chan & Sprinkle, 2011) Francis Chan and Dr Preston Sprinkle lean towards ECT through the book, *Erasing Hell*, though they provide a fair summary of CI. Dr Preston Sprinkle as since argued that CI or ‘terminal punishment’ as he calls it is an evangelical position:

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/theologyintheraw/2015/02/is-annihilation-an-evangelical-option/>

²² See *The Fire that Consumes* by Edward Fudge, The Third Edition includes full responses to those who have critiqued the original edition. It is comprehensive and expands the various Old Testament references in far more detail. *Rethinking Hell* edited by Christopher Date, Gregory Stump and Joshua Anderson is a comprehensive collection of articles written by various scholars from John Stott, John Wenham and Edward Fudge to more recent scholars Ben Witherington III, Peter Grice, Glenn Peoples. It also includes statements from the Evangelical Alliance.

²³ See one example at: <https://wrostoll.blogspot.com/2014/12/a-list-of-Scriptures-supporting.html>

²⁴ (Walton, 2001)

SCRIPTURE	QUOTE	COMMENTS
Genesis 6:3	“Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal (Or corrupt - NIV note or flesh - ESV) their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”	Mortal is the translation from the Hebrew <i>basar</i> which is also translated as flesh, creatures or living creatures depending on translation.
Job 4:9	“By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.”	Eliphaz speaks about those who do not fear God, who are not innocent and “who plough iniquity” will be consumed. Christians are rightly wary of getting theology from the book of Job, but this shows a belief in a God who totally consumes the wicked so that they are no more.
Psalms 1:4-6	“Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.”	As opposed to a righteous man who will be a non-withering tree, the wicked are driven away like chaff, not able to stand judgement and their way will perish. NET2 ²⁵ Bible translates it as their way will “end in destruction”.
Psalms 2:9-12	“You will break them with a rod of iron you will dash them to pieces like pottery.” Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling. Kiss his son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”	“lead to your destruction” is the same Hebrew word <i>abad</i> as Psalm’s 1:4-6. It is also translated as <i>perish</i> . The language strongly suggests the reader should follow God or face destruction. This verse could be simply talking about an end to physical life, but destruction is contrasted to blessing in refuge.
Psalms 9:5-6, 18-20	“You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked; you have blotted out their name for ever and ever. Endless ruin has overtaken my enemies,	The expectation of judgement is often highlighted using the Old Testament by those who hold to ECT but the clarity of the expected result of judgement is often ignored ²⁶ . “Endless ruin” and “even the memory of them has

²⁵ See <http://netbible.org> – NET 2 is the second edition of the New English Translation

²⁶ Fudge highlights the lack of engagement with the Psalms by 7 authors who have engaged with *The Fire that Consumes*. Few, if any, proponents of a traditional view discuss the Psalms in detail when discussing future judgement.

	<p>you have uprooted their cities; even the memory of them has perished.”</p> <p>“But God will never forget the needy; the hope of the afflicted will never perish.</p> <p>Arise, Lord, do not let mortals triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence.</p> <p>Strike them with terror, Lord; let the nations know they are only mortal.”</p>	<p>perished” highlight an emphasis on an end of the wicked. If God ends the memory and conscious existence of the wicked in this life, why would He decide to keep the memory of them in the next?</p> <p>The emphasis at the end of the psalm is that hope will never perish. The reader must be consistent, if perish does not mean an end then putting ‘never’ next to perish is meaningless. Though one use of perish cannot be used to interpret every use throughout the bible, the juxtaposition of the ruin and end of enemies in light of the prayer for the never perishing hope for the afflicted is a problem for the traditional view that perish is an ongoing form of consciousness.</p>
Psalm 68:2, 20	<p>“May you blow them away like smoke— as wax melts before the fire, may the wicked perish before God.”</p> <p>“Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign Lord comes escape from death.”</p>	<p>This may not be a Psalm that links to future judgement, but it assumes similar language that will be seen later. Wax melts before fire and the wicked perish. As seen in Psalm 9, this points to an end.</p> <p>Verse 20 is states that God saves us from death. Without God’s intervention humans are mere mortals.</p>
Psalm 73:27	<p>“Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.”</p>	<p>Be it in this life or the next, those who are far from, separated from God’s presence will perish – end. Those who are unfaithful will be destroyed/cut off. The relational aspect of separation is often highlighted in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 and the argument of Hell being separation from God as opposed to destruction made. Psalm 73:27 states that those who are separate will perish.</p>
Proverbs 10:24, 25, 27, 28, 29	<p>²⁴What the wicked dread will overtake them; what the righteous desire will be granted.</p> <p>²⁵When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever.</p> <p>²⁷The fear of the Lord adds length to life, but the years of the wicked are cut short.</p>	<p>There must be care taken to not jump to conclusions regarding doctrine when reading Psalms and Proverbs. They are the ideals of life, general principles, but not necessarily written rules. The principles being highlighted here contrast the wicked and the righteous. The wicked: dread what will overtake them, will be swept away by a storm, will be cut short and their hopes will come to nothing.</p>

	<p>²⁸The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing.</p> <p>²⁹The way of the Lord is a refuge for the blameless, but it is the ruin of those who do evil.</p>	<p>The righteous: desires will be granted, stand firm forever, have their life lengthened and look forward to joy.</p> <p>If the reader is quick to see a future past death for the righteous, then they must remain consistent and read future judgement for the wicked in this verse.</p>
Isaiah 1:27-28	<p>²⁷Zion will be delivered with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness.</p> <p>²⁸But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the Lord will perish.”</p>	<p>A contrast between the righteous and those who will perish.</p>
Isaiah 51:6-8	<p>⁶Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.</p> <p>⁷“Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have taken my instruction to heart: Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults.</p> <p>⁸For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool. But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.”</p>	<p>“Heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies” are contrasted with God’s salvation which “will last forever” and His righteousness “will never fail”.</p> <p>This language points to various aspects of life as we know it ending in contrast to God’s salvation which will last forever.</p> <p>A moth ruins a garment and a worm devours a corpse. This language will be looked at in the New Testament section of this paper. Both are contrasted with God’s righteousness and salvation lasting forever.</p> <p>The two parts together contrast things that will end/be destroyed with God’s salvation which will last forever.</p>
Daniel 12:1-2	<p>¹“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. ²Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”</p>	<p>This is quoted to refer to resurrection of both the sinner and the righteous to judgement (as per Revelation 20), but it is misquoted to be a signpost for ECT. A traditional view reads “everlasting contempt” to mean that those in shame must be conscious. This is simple eisegesis (reading culture and tradition into the text) not good exegesis (letting Scripture speak). Contempt, or disdain, is felt by those looking on, not necessarily by those under contempt. Those under contempt aren’t necessarily conscious either, for</p>

		example those who desecrate graves have contempt for the dead. See Isaiah 66:24 in the next section for further discussion.
Nahum 1:5-6	<p>“The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him.”</p>	This passage is referenced simply to note that God’s wrath cannot be endured or withstood by a human. That even enduring objects such as mountains and hills will melt away before God. If these immovable objects ‘melt’, what will happen to a human?
Zephaniah 1:14-18	<p>¹⁴The great day of the Lord is near— near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the Lord is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry.</p> <p>¹⁵That day will be a day of wrath— a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness—</p> <p>¹⁶a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers.</p> <p>¹⁷“I will bring such distress on all people that they will grope about like those who are blind, because they have sinned against the Lord. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like dung.</p> <p>¹⁸Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord’s wrath.”</p> <p>In the fire of his jealousy the whole earth will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth.”</p>	<p>This isn’t a passage often referenced in church services, but it is seen as both a reference for the Babylonian invasion and a symbolic depiction of the end times²⁷</p> <p>The word “consumed” connotes an end and the final lines only make this connotation stronger.</p> <p>The phrase “sudden end” is a translation of <i>kalah</i> which is also translated “destruction” in other passages such as Isaiah 10:23.</p> <p>As we have seen previously, no human can withstand or endure God’s wrath. They will be “poured out” and “melt like wax”. Their corpses will be desecrated by being unburied and left with their entrails out. This is not a pleasant image, but it shows the ideas that are understood behind language like ‘consumed’, ‘fire’ and ‘destroy’ that continue to build the solid scriptural foundation that immortality is conditional to salvation by God.</p>

Figure 2: Old Testament Scripture pointing to a final destruction

Psalm 37

This section will finish with Psalm 37. It would be recommended to read the whole chapter but for brevity, some verses will be cut to highlight the key ideas that are relevant to this paper.

²⁷ (Halley, 2014)

¹Do not fret because of those who are evil
or be envious of **those who do wrong;**
²**for like the grass they will soon wither,**
like green plants they will soon die away.

...

⁹For those who **are evil will be destroyed,**
but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land.

¹⁰A little while, and the **wicked will be no more;**
though you look for them, **they will not be found.**

¹¹But the meek will inherit the land
and enjoy peace and prosperity.

¹²The wicked plot against the righteous
and gnash their teeth at them;

¹³but the Lord laughs at the wicked,
for he knows their day is coming.

¹⁴The wicked draw the sword
and bend the bow
to bring down the poor and needy,
to slay those whose ways are upright.

¹⁵**But their swords will pierce their own hearts,**
and their bows will be broken.

¹⁶Better the little that the righteous have
than the wealth of many wicked;

¹⁷for the power of the wicked will be broken,
but the Lord upholds the righteous.

¹⁸**The blameless spend their days under the Lord's care,**
and their inheritance will endure forever.

¹⁹**In times of disaster they will not wither;**
in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.

²⁰**But the wicked will perish:**
Though the Lord's enemies are like the flowers of the field,
they will be consumed, they will go up in smoke.

²¹The wicked borrow and do not repay,
but the righteous give generously;

²²those the Lord blesses will inherit the land,
but **those he curses will be destroyed.**

...

²⁷Turn from evil and do good;
then you will dwell in the land forever.

²⁸For the Lord loves the just
and will not forsake his faithful ones.
Wrongdoers will be completely destroyed;
the offspring of the wicked will perish.

²⁹The righteous will inherit the land
and dwell in it forever.

³⁰The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom,
and their tongues speak what is just.

³¹The law of their God is in their hearts;
their feet do not slip.

³²The wicked lie in wait for the righteous,

intent on putting them to death;
³³*but the Lord will not leave them in the power of the wicked*
or let them be condemned when brought to trial.
³⁴*Hope in the Lord*
and keep his way.
He will exalt you to inherit the land;
*when the **wicked are destroyed**, you will see it.*
³⁵*I have seen a wicked and ruthless man*
flourishing like a luxuriant native tree,
³⁶*but **he soon passed away and was no more**;*
*though I looked for him, **he could not be found**.*
³⁷*Consider the blameless, observe the upright;*
a future awaits those who seek peace.
³⁸***But all sinners will be destroyed;***
there will be no future
³⁹*The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord;*
he is their stronghold in time of trouble.
⁴⁰*The Lord helps them and delivers them;*
he delivers them from the wicked and saves them,
because they take refuge in him.

Currently in researching this paper, there has been minimal engagement by those who hold the traditional view in the Psalms or any of the Old Testament²⁸. Even in *Hell Under Fire*²⁹, a thorough defence of the traditional view by 9 leading biblical scholars, there is only passing reference to the Psalms. When the Psalms are referenced, many ignore the detail³⁰ and it is not clear why. The only interaction witnessed in dialogue personally by the author is one of explaining the end here as ‘physical death’ as opposed to death in the afterlife. There is an issue with the consistency of this interpretation. If the language of the sinner’s destruction to the point of ‘being no more’ is not into the afterlife then the language of salvation for the righteous enduring forever must also be limited. This then limits the Psalm to just David’s time and rules out the Psalms from speaking of anything more. This is not an encouraged way to read the Psalms.

It may be noted that language regarding Hell is minimal so far. This is because Francis Chan is correct; the Old Testament does not talk about Hell very much, if at all. As can be seen from the verses shown however, it is not silent on the end waiting for those who are not saved by God. The Old Testament shows a God that does not live with wickedness and evil and will have them destroyed. Whether this theme continues to hold into the New Testament will be discussed in the sections discussing the New Testament.

²⁸ Wayne Grudem limits his book on Heaven and Hell to the New Testament bar one reference to Ecclesiastes 12:14 and a minor reference to Mal 3:16 with no further expansion (Grudem, 2012). This is a glaring oversight considering the New Testaments has over 900 quotes, allusions and possible allusions to the Old Testament. (Blue Letter Bible, 2019) Christians build doctrine from the entire Bible whereas Grudem has avoided most of it and then built his argument.

²⁹ *Hell Under Fire* is touted to be the best defence of the traditional view and is co-authored by Gregory Beale, Daniel Block, Sinclair Ferguson, R. Albert Mohler Jr, Douglas Moo, Christopher Morgan, J. I. Packer, Robert Peterson and Robert Yarbrough. All are big names in evangelical scholarship.

³⁰ Edward Fudge in his book, *The Fire that Consumes*, shows the interaction he has had with 17 authors, including John Blanchard who does engage with the Psalms and Proverbs and many references in the OT in his book *Whatever Happened to Hell*. All 17 authors have opposing views and there is very little response with regard to the many Old Testament passages.

The Language of Fire and Worms

The Old Testament is referenced extensively by the New Testament. The doctrines Christians hold to must be built from an understanding of the overview of Scripture and not just a few verses within one of the testaments. The key point here is that the New Testament language did not crop up in a vacuum. Jesus and the New Testament authors continually used language that references the Old Testament both in the terms used as well as their commonly held meanings at that time. Many references of Hell in the New Testament use similar language to that in the Old Testament specifically around worms and fire. In this section a summary of Old Testament Scriptures referring to fire will be given.

Isaiah 66:22-24

²²“As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the Lord, “so will your name and descendants endure. ²³From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the Lord. ²⁴“And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.”

This is the main Old Testament Scripture referenced by the New Testament when talking about fire and worms. Jesus particularly uses the imagery in Mark 9. When referenced by those who hold to ECT, the passage is often not discussed in detail. The main detail that is missing from the traditional commentaries is that the worms are eating corpses³¹. Corpses are not conscious though they are loathsome (see Daniel 12 above). The disgust is felt by those alive looking at the corpses not the other way around. To leave a body out unburied brought great shame and no Jew (or anyone for that matter!) would want their memory to be that of an unburied corpse being eaten by worms³².

The traditional view reads both ‘unquenchable’ and ‘worms will not die’ in a similar light; both are read as everlasting or never ending. This is not helped by those who misquote the passage as ‘never dying’ worms³³. Just as an unquenchable fire might well go out once the fuel is consumed, a worm may not die until the dead flesh has been consumed. Regardless of how the physics of the afterlife might work regarding worms and fire, the corpse is dead and not conscious of being eaten. The traditional view argues that a reference to a corpse in the Old Testament does not mean that the soul is not living on for judgement³⁴. This is not only reading the view of an immortal soul into Scripture, but it is also an argument from silence. Mark quotes specific aspects of Isaiah 66 and does not state that the corpses in the passage in Isaiah would be reanimated in the afterlife to be continuously eaten by worms. See more on Mark in the third section of this paper.

Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse books outside of the protestant canon, it must be noted here that there are references to Isaiah 66:24 in apocrypha books. The most notable reference is Judith 16:17 which adds that at judgement the Lord will ‘put fire and worms in their flesh; and they shall weep and feel their pain for ever’. Many traditionalists highlight that this points to a unanimous understanding in Judaism that hell was eternal conscious torment. This is not true

³¹ The closest Wayne Grudem gets is Isaiah 66:22 in his digital short *Heaven and Hell*. David Pawson doesn’t even reference the passage in his book *The Road to Hell*. Fudge argues most strongly against Peterson’s criticisms which seem more to debate Fudge’s methodology when his own seems questionable (Fudge, 2011).

³² Though I think much is wrong with David Pawson’s book on Hell, I can at least agree with him on this point.

³³ David Pawson is guilty of this and says that the fire doesn’t consume the worm (Pawson, 1996).

³⁴ This argument has been seen online in discussions with those holding a traditional view in the Rethinking Hell Facebook group. I have yet to read a detailed discussion in print arguing this though there may well be one.

and in-depth scholarship finds ‘a heterogeneous mass of ideas in constant flux’³⁵ during the intertestamental period in which Judith was written.

Further references in Isaiah

SCRIPTURE	QUOTE	COMMENT
1:30-31	<p>³⁰You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water.</p> <p>³¹The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire.”</p>	<p>Here a filter must be removed. In the non-Christian world, a fire that is going with no one to quench it will burn until the fuel is consumed. This does not necessitate an unending fire. Isaiah is using the commonly known mechanics of fire to show that a man and his works will burn until they are consumed as no one will quench the fire. Though not a pointer to the afterlife, it shows how fire is viewed in scripture.</p>
5:24-25	<p>²⁴Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers blow away like dust; for they have rejected the law of the Lord Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel.</p> <p>²⁵Therefore the Lord’s anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down. The mountains shake, and the dead bodies are like refuse in the streets. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.</p>	<p>Isaiah is referencing the destruction under the Assyrians but as will be shown in the discussion on Isaiah 66:24 and in future sections (see Mark), Isaiah’s descriptions were used by Jesus and other New Testament writers to point to the afterlife as well.</p> <p>What happens when the fire consumes? The ash is blown away like dust. Whatever remains of the corpses are littering the streets. The picture is complete destruction and death. These bodies have no consciousness or recognition of their own decay.</p>
33:10-14	<p>¹⁰“Now will I arise,” says the Lord. “Now will I be exalted; now will I be lifted up.</p> <p>¹¹You conceive chaff, you give birth to straw; your breath is a fire that consumes you.</p> <p>¹²The peoples will be burned to ashes; like cut thornbushes they will be set ablaze.”</p> <p>¹³You who are far away, hear what I have done; you who are near, acknowledge my power!</p> <p>¹⁴The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: “Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire?”</p>	<p>People will be burned to ashes and sinners fear what is coming exclaiming, “who can dwell with the consuming fire?”</p> <p>The “everlasting burning” is an interesting rendering of the Hebrew where NET2 renders it “unquenchable fire” while ESV renders it “everlasting burnings”. Either way, the meaning can be viewed through the rhetorical nature and reading the verses in the immediate context. Only those who are righteous can dwell with the consuming fire (vs 15). This is similar language to Hebrews 12:29.</p>

³⁵ (Fudge, 2011) Fudge is quoting Charles, A in his *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life*.

	Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning? ¹⁵ He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking on evil, ...”	
51:8	“For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool. But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.”	Worms devour/consume. Whatever they consume will not last forever as opposed to God’s righteousness which will.

Figure 3: References in Isaiah for fire and worms

Further References in Old Testament

Isaiah is the most commonly referenced Old Testament book regarding Hell, but he is not the only Old Testament author to discuss these themes. Four more references will be discussed here though again, this is not an exhaustive list.

SCRIPTURE	QUOTE	COMMENT
Genesis 19:23-28	“ ²³ By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. ²⁴ Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens. ²⁵ Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. ²⁶ But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. ²⁷ Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord. ²⁸ He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.”	This is referenced simply because the New Testament refers to Genesis 19 as a sign for what will become of those who are not saved. The picture given is complete desolation and smoke rising from the destruction. No living thing is seen, not even vegetation. Destruction from fire and smoke signifies the living have been destroyed. See discussion on 2 Peter and Jude.
Ezekiel 28:18-19	¹⁸ By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. ¹⁹ All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more.”	Though written as a lament for the king of Tyre, verses 12 to 19 have the Devil in view. Verse 19 shows what a consuming fire does in that it reduces whatever is in it to ash. Whether or not this happens to the devil does depend on further study but is a logical conclusion when CI is in view.
Nahum 1:10	“They will be consumed like dry stubble.”	Like in real life, stubble does not last long and leaves very little ash. This is used to highlight the consistent understanding of what

		'consumed' and fire does throughout the Old Testament.
Malachi 4:1-3	" ¹ "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. ² But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. ³ Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act," says the Lord Almighty.	Phrases such as "not a root or branch will be left to them" and "they will be ashes under the soles of your feet" point to the complete destruction of the wicked that removes any idea of consciousness being a viable interpretation once the final punishment has been carried out following God's judgement.

Figure 4: Further Old Testament references regarding fire and worms

In conclusion, the Old Testament teaches that the wicked will end, they will perish, they are not immortal, and that judgement will lead to destruction (Malachi 4:1-3). This is juxtaposed with the righteous having a future (Psalm 37). The imagery of fire refers to a real world understanding of the mechanics of fire – it consumes its fuel unless it is quenched. An unquenchable fire will consume all its fuel because no one will put it out. Those who are destroyed may well be looked upon by those who live. The theme of corpses and ash show, if not annihilation, then the ungodly will not be conscious after judgement and punishment has been carried out, at least not in the Old Testament view. Some argue that through progressive revelation the New Testament expands the view of the afterlife, while this is true in parts, this paper will look at whether this is true for the eternal torment of the ungodly after judgement day in the next sections.

From the CI perspective, this imagery shows that God is a God of justice and the wicked that end up slain will be deserving of that end. It is only by the grace of God that Christians avoid such an end. God, in his mercy, spares those who tortured in this life from eternal torture, those who murdered from a death-like eternal conscious existence. God ends the wicked so that evil is not in His presence and not sustained by Him. Evil will not mar the new creation that will be in view as this paper moves in to the New Testament.

Hell in Jesus' Teaching

Jesus' teaching is the focal point for many arguing for an eternal conscious torment in Hell³⁶. Unfortunately, many who defend the traditional view engage minimally with or ignore the Old Testament and either try to interpret Jesus' teaching through 2nd temple Judaism (the writings between the testaments) or by linking only to Revelation³⁷. Though understanding common thought within the intertestamental period is important, the danger comes when doctrine is clarified and defended through the writings of that time period. Similarly, referencing one or two verses within Revelation as a means for clarifying a doctrine in any other scenario would also raise alarm bells due to the symbolic nature of the book where context is vital for understanding.

Edward Fudge, in the third edition of his book *The Fire that Consumes*, highlights the issue through summarising the interactions from other authors with his work. He engages with 17 traditionalist authors and through the Old Testament passages, Fudge repeatedly highlights that the vast majority have ignored the passage altogether or overlooked details within the passage. *Hell Under Fire* which includes Fudge's writings within its critiques begins the chapter on hell with, "What does the Old Testament teach about hell? The simple answer to this question is, "Very little."³⁸

The next section of this paper will look at Jesus' language on Hell considering what has been read and discussed in the Old Testament. It will highlight some verses that are used as an argument for ECT and discuss the various difficulties that they raise for the CI view. Revelation and other New Testament books may be referred to but will be discussed in more detail in the final section.

Matthew

Most of the passages used to prove an eternal conscious torment in Hell come from the book of Matthew. There are some significant passages that seem to contradict a CI view of judgement, but it could be argued that this is due to the filters that the passages are read through. Many passages become much less about eternal torment and potentially, if read with the Old Testament in mind more about destruction. With any exegesis it is important to translate passages that are ambiguous with those that are clear. What this paper hopes to have shown up to this point is that the Old Testament teaches the righteous will live forever through God's intervention and those who are not in the book of life (see Daniel 12) will head to destruction (Isaiah and Malachi). When terms such as fire and destruction are used in the Old Testament the imagery points to the human no longer being conscious. The plain meanings of perish, burnt up, ash, corpse, death and others can be accepted without requiring further explanation as to how they mean torment.

Three passages in Matthew will be discussed to highlight the main themes regarding Hell and then other references will be given with short summaries.

Matthew 3:7-12

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

³⁶ David Pawson in *The Road to Hell* uses this argument to base most of his arguments from the Gospels and Revelation.

³⁷ This is particularly true of Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle in *Erasing Hell* and Wayne Grudem in his *Systematic Theology*. The engagement in *Hell Under Fire* is also limited in scope.

³⁸ What the chapter does engage with is either irrelevant to this paper or has already been covered.

¹¹“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Here John the Baptist produces the imagery of trees being cut and thrown into the fire and chaff being burnt up with unquenchable fire. The passage has similar themes to Nahum 1 and Malachi 4 where stubble is consumed, and roots and branches become ash under the feet of the righteous. John the Baptist seems to highlight the understanding that God’s judgment will lead to the destruction of those who are not in the book of life.

The traditional view focuses on the “unquenchable” rather than the “burning up the chaff”. “Unquenchable” has often been read as a fire that never ends and is therefore eternal in duration as discussed previously when looking at Isaiah. Outside of Scripture, an unquenchable fire is one that simply cannot be put out through intervention. Imagery from real life is used to give the reader of an idea of how the afterlife can be pictured. It could be said that the fires that swept across California in 2018 were unquenchable as they consumed whole towns and forests. This does not mean the fires are continuing now and forever. This can then be applied to what John and other Scriptures mean when speaking of an unquenchable fire. They are unquenchable while they consume their fuel.

Imagery of real life is used to give us a bit of an idea of what to expect in the afterlife, but care should be taken to not stretch the imagery one way or the other. The afterlife is not exactly like this life and the traditionalist is often keen to point this out. Though eternal torment may have been an interpretation in Judaism at the time of Jesus it is unclear that this was the dominant perspective and the views of early church fathers are still being debated³⁹. Therefore, reading a traditional view of eternal torment into this passage is not necessary and this author argues that it stretches the imagery that John uses. This paper references this passage to show that John the Baptist uses imagery that, if viewed in the present world, shows a complete destruction rather than an endless one and this imagery compliments the biblical language from the Old Testament.

Matthew 10:28

Matthew quotes Jesus referring to Gehenna (translated as Hell) more than any of the other gospels. The language surrounding Gehenna is important to highlight here before looking at more verses. The clearest verse from Jesus explaining the purpose of Gehenna is Matthew 10:28:

²⁸Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Gehenna).

In this verse, Jesus states that the body and soul are destroyed in Gehenna. This is contrasted with the fear of being killed while on earth. To avoid the obvious and most recognised meaning of “destroy”, the traditional view reads verses from Revelation into this passage rather than looking to the Old Testament context of destruction. Jesus teaches that Hell, Gehenna, will destroy body and soul, not continuously, but completely. The scope of the paper is to show that CI is an orthodox view of Hell. CI does not require any re-interpretation of this verse and can take the words at face value.

Gehenna has often been referred to as a garbage dump that was always burning. There is no evidence earlier than 1200AD for this idea and no archaeological evidence has been found either. There is very convincing evidence that Gehenna is “an explicit reference to the Jeremaic Valley of Slaughter where God severely judged the nation of Judah.”⁴⁰

³⁹ (Peoples, 2013)

⁴⁰ (Loewen, 2018)

Matthew 25:31-46

This is one of the most used passages from the entire Bible to say that those who end up in Hell will face eternal torment. The weight of Scripture up to this point must not be forgotten though the New Testament should be allowed to bring more revelation to the orthodox understanding of Hell if that is what the scripture shows. As discussed previously, ECT was a potential view of many Jews in Jesus' time but it was not the only view through which the listeners would have heard this message.⁴¹

⁴¹ *'Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was ill and in prison and you did not look after me."*

⁴⁴ *'They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or ill or in prison, and did not help you?"*

⁴⁵ *'He will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."*

⁴⁶ *'Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.'*

The focus for this passage will be the phrases "eternal fire", "eternal punishment", and "eternal life". This paper will not delve into the Greek for 'punishment' as there is not much variation between translations. "Punishment" must not be misunderstood as the verb "punishing". The former implies in English, as it does in the Greek, that something will take place for a finite duration or has already taken place. For example, Isaiah states "The punishment that brought us peace was on him", it is agreed that Jesus' punishment is not still ongoing (Isaiah 53:5). Though the verse in Matthew will be discussed further (see section on Hebrews), Jude 1:7 does clarify what this punishment will be:

"In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire."

The Greek word, *aionios*, is translated as eternal and has many aspects that aren't specific to the English word. The two main aspects⁴² are 1) that anything that is eternal is supernatural, not of this age or specifically 'of the age to come' and 2) lasting forever, be it looking into the past or the future. The punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah was eternal fire which destroyed it completely as discussed previously. The fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah was not eternal in terms of its duration as Sodom and Gomorrah are not still burning. Jude's usage of the word eternal here suggests the fire to be specifically aspect 1 above and not aspect 2.

The orthodox understanding of eternal in 'eternal life' is both aspect 1 and 2 in that those in Christ receive life that is in the age to come and that it will last forever.

In the passage above the 'eternal' in 'eternal punishment' is compared with 'eternal life'. It is with this context in mind that both eternal punishment and eternal life both have aspects 1 and 2 of *aionios* discussed above. The punishment is carried out in the age to come and the result of the

⁴¹ Fudge goes into in-depth analysis of the intertestamental writings and shows that ECT was not the sole view of the time. (Fudge, 2011)

⁴² This is my own summary of an argument put forward by Edward Fudge in *A Fire That Consumes*. Fudge engages with various views throughout the book but makes the case for the qualitative and quantitative aspects of *aionios*.

punishment will last forever because the punishment is eternal fire.⁴³ That which experiences eternal fire is destroyed.

Robert Peterson misrepresents the CI interpretation of aionios stating that those who hold to CI claim it only means “the age to come” and not “everlasting”⁴⁴. This is not what is being argued in this paper. CI holds to the interpretation that “eternal punishment” is “eternal destruction” (2 Thess 1:9) and this simply means the effect of the destruction will be everlasting. Those who are destroyed are not returning or conscious after their destruction. Peterson also uses 2 Thess 1:9 as an argument against CI which seems a strange choice due to the emphasis on destruction in the passage. Instead of taking destruction at its plain meaning as previously discussed in this paper, Peterson uses Revelation 14:11 and 20:10 to interpret them. This is unfortunately common but, as will be shown in the section on Revelation, it is poor exegesis due to the nature of the two verses in question. They are far less certain in their meaning than the number of verses that this paper has already discussed. The discussion regarding eternal punishment and eternal destruction will be continued further in the next section.

Clark H Pinnock states that Jesus does not clarify what eternal life OR eternal punishment look like in this passage and therefore this passage is open to CI or ECT depending on how a person views other Scripture.⁴⁵ Edward Fudge argues in *The Fire that Consumes* that the overview of Scripture points to the result of eternal punishment being the understanding of death discussed in this paper – an event that leaves no consciousness or awareness of being. This paper agrees with Fudge in that the passages of Jude 1:7 and 2 Peter 2:6 show eternal fire destroys permanently and this is the eternal punishment Jesus was talking about in Matthew 25.

Further References to Hell and Destruction in Matthew

SCRIPTURE	QUOTE	COMMENT
5:22, 29, 30	<p>²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister without cause will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of Hell (<i>also seen in Matthew 18:9</i>).</p> <p>²⁹If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into Hell.</p> <p>³⁰And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into Hell.</p>	<p>This verse says nothing of the purpose and duration of Hell (Gehenna in both instances) other than using the language of fire. Fire, as seen up to this point, is consistently linked with destruction that has an end.</p> <p>Further discussion on verses 29 and 30 can be seen later when discussing the parallel verses in Mark 9.</p>

⁴³ Mark Corbett makes a far more detailed case for the definition of aionios in relation to the universalist argument which focuses on the aspect of lasting for an age. He makes it clear that throughout the NT eternal is not only the correct interpretation of aionios he also shows it does mean both of God and eternal in duration. (Corbett, What Does Aionios Mean in Matthew 25:46, 2017)

⁴⁴ (Peterson, 2014)

⁴⁵ Clark Pinnock’s statement can be found in the book Rethinking Hell which uses his article “Destruction of the finally impenitent”, published in the Criswell Theological Review. (Date, Stump, & Anderson, 2014)

6:19-20	¹⁹ ‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.	Heaven holds treasures that are safe. Moths and vermin are seen to destroy. Though this is not a verse with a view of Hell, the opposite of heaven is destruction. What is not in heaven will not last.
7:13-14	¹³ ‘Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.	Life and destruction are contrasted.
13:40-42	⁴⁰ ‘As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.	Weeds are burned in fire. The traditionalist reads into verse 42 that the wicked will be alive forever in the furnace. The language of this verse, without filters and preconceptions, does not state any such duration. One can easily imagine that being consumed by fire is not instant and so both sorrow/anguish (weeping) and anger (gnashing of teeth) could be heard before the wicked are completely destroyed. ⁴⁶

Figure 5: References to a final punishment in Matthew

Highly symbolic passages from Revelation along with traditional filters have been used to interpret Jesus’ teaching. Some have made the conclusion that ECT is the best interpretation of Scripture by linking Matthew 25 with Revelation 14 and 20 while not engaging with the Old Testament language of destruction⁴⁷ and the statements given by 2 Peter 2:4-6 and Jude 1:7 regarding the example of Sodom and Gomorrah for what will happen to the ungodly (see discussion on both in the next section). When the reader is not looking for ECT in the text, the text leads to a logical conclusion in favour of CI. From studying the previous texts in Matthew, hell will be where the wicked face eternal destruction through eternal fire and not a continuing existence of torment.

Mark

There is one main passage used against CI in Mark from chapter 9:

⁴² ‘If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me – to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung round their neck and they were thrown into the sea. ⁴³If your hand causes you to stumble,

⁴⁶ “Weeping and gnashing of teeth” is a significant phrase often used to highlight pain and torment in the traditional view. Joseph Dear goes into far more depth regarding this phrase in his article on rethinkhell.com as to why this is a misreading of the phrase. (Dear, 2018)

⁴⁷ Pawson, Grudem and Peterson are all guilty of this. A paper by Andrew Ryland in 2012, though generally fair in its summary of CI states, “The combination of Matthew 25:31-46, Revelation 14:9-11 and Revelation 20:10 in their respective contexts, is good evidence that when Jesus spoke of hell, he understood it to describe a place of Eternal Conscious Torment for the wicked.” This is a logical leap and an example of the weight placed on two verses in Revelation to interpret Matthew that are not as obvious as they might seem. (Ryland, 2012)

*cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. ⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸where
 “the worms that eat them do not die,
 and the fire is not quenched.”
⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire.
 NIV note: verse 44 in some manuscripts include the words of verse 48*

This passage when read with the background of Isaiah 66:24 doesn't seem to hold much weight for the traditional view. If worms that eat corpses do not die, it could be assumed that there is a lot of dead flesh around for them to consume. It means nothing of the consciousness of that which is being eaten. Again, the language of fire not being quenched, no longer read with the filter of ECT but with the understanding of the Old Testament language, makes sense of verse 48. It would make better sense of the entire passage that it would be better to enter **life** maimed rather than being **dead** and eaten by worms and burnt up in fire.

Luke

Luke does not discuss hell or judgement frequently. In fact, there is only one reference to Gehenna in Luke 12:5 and it is mirrored in Matthew 10:28 as previously discussed:

“But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.”

This doesn't say anything regarding duration, consciousness or torment and so the reader must not stretch this to one position or another. Again, the reader must be aware of the filters with which passages are read.

There are two passages in Luke 13 that will be briefly discussed:

Verses 2-5:

²Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’

and verse 28:

‘There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.

Though neither show much with regards to hell, Jesus uses the contrast of repent (life) and perish (death) that has been seen previously and will be seen more in the New Testament. In verse 28, those who are thrown out of the kingdom of God will weep and gnash their teeth. This is important as it highlights the sorrow and anger (gnashing of teeth) that those under judgement feel. Every time

this phrase is used it relates to anger and not pain as some commentators have interpreted the phrase to overstate the case for ECT⁴⁸.

Luke 16 – The Rich Man and Lazarus

Wayne Grudem links this passage with Mark 9:43 and 48 to highlight the everlasting and horrible nature of the punishment of hell.⁴⁹ Peterson focuses on this passage to state that Jesus describes “hell in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus as a ‘place of torment’ involving ‘anguish in this flame’”.⁵⁰ David Pawson also states that this parable is talking about hell despite discussing the ambiguity and doctrinal issues of the parable and so it is unclear why he has come to this conclusion.⁵¹ Using Luke 16 to give depth to the argument for ECT raises significant problems for the doctrine of hell generally, let alone issues around its duration and nature.

Grudem focuses on verses 22-24:

“²²The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴So he called to him, “Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.”

These three verses alone raise significant questions as to whether Jesus was teaching doctrine. 1) Where is Abraham’s side? (significantly, Grudem states verses 22-24 but misses this first sentence) 2) Hades is not hell (Gehenna, see terms in the first section of the paper) but a place of the dead, 3) There is no other scriptural basis for communication between hell and heaven 4) This is not after judgement due to the fact the rich man’s family is still alive.

The danger of this passage is that it is quoted in isolation as the basis for the traditional view of hell. These questions are not just to defend CI. Some defenders of the traditional view such as Robert Peterson urge caution from pressing too much from the parable⁵². The message is about a man who ignores the beggar at his gate, remains arrogant enough to think he can continue to order the service of a poor man after death and refuses to take responsibility for listening to the prophets while on earth. Jesus uses a commonly known rabbinical tale regarding the afterlife and puts his twist on it⁵³. This parable is not a solid foundation to base any doctrine of hell on.

⁴⁸ Fudge analyses this phrase and agrees with many scholars of differing views that say ‘gnashing of teeth’ denotes anger and defiance. Fudge also notes that Dr Peterson, an author who interacts with Fudge’s writings, creates his own definition to then insinuate that pain will last eternally. (Fudge, 2011)

⁴⁹ (Grudem, 2012)

⁵⁰ (Peterson, 2014)

⁵¹ (Pawson, 1996)

⁵² Edward Fudge in *The Fire that Consumes*, quotes Robert Peterson as saying “we must be careful not to derive from this parable things that God never intended” from Peterson’s book *Hell on Trial*. He also quotes Robert E. Webber as stating, “it is probably better to see the story not as revealing details of life after death, but rather as giving a different twist to commonly held views about afterlife.” Quoted from *What Christians Believe* by Johnson and Webber. (Fudge, 2011)

⁵³ Fudge quotes a multitude of authors to make his case but most notably NT Wright from *Jesus and the Victory of God*, “The story carries clear echoes of well-known folk tales to which Jesus is giving a fresh and startling twist...The parable is not, as often supposed, a description of the afterlife, warning people to be sure of the ultimate destination.” He shows this through Robert Morey who also agrees that this was a common rabbinical tale at the time and Hugo Gressmann who states there were at least seven versions of the story in Jewish literature. (Fudge, 2011)

John

The gospel of John frequently contrasts eternal life and death. John does this by using various words to clarify what is meant by death. John 3 contains the most famous comparisons. There are many iterations of these themes throughout John that will be highlighted at the end of this section.

John 3:

¹³No-one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man. ¹⁴Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵**that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.**'

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, **that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to **save the world through him.**

¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but **whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.** ¹⁹This is the verdict: light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does **evil hates the light**, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹But whoever **lives by the truth comes into the light**, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

...

³⁵The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. ³⁶**Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.**

This chapter in John, alongside the previous conclusions from the Old Testament and the other gospels, only establish the case for CI further. Immortality being only for those who believe in Jesus is quite conclusive. Immortality, eternal life, is only available to those who believe in the Son. To avoid equivocating immortality and eternal life, it is important to state that "eternal" is both the relational aspect of being right with God in the age to come as well as being in this position forever.

God's wrath which is connected to "not seeing life" and "perish" is the alternative to life. Perish is defined either as: 1) to die especially in an accident or by being killed or to be destroyed⁵⁴ 2) rot or decay – generally linked to lifeless objects. It is the same for the Greek word (*apollumi/apoleia*) and as Mark Corbett shows in his word study of perish, both the Greek and English are not being used with "some strange, unexpected meaning, but rather...that 'perish' means 'perish' and 'destroy' means 'destroy'"⁵⁵.

John does not state that those who perish will not be judged. He speaks of condemnation and wrath regularly. John states in 5:14 that anyone who believes in God, "*will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life*". Further on in chapter 5 that there will be a resurrection of the dead, that "*those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned*" (5:29)

John repeats this theme continually throughout the gospel as the following table shows.

Further references to eternal life in John

SCRIPTURE	QUOTE	COMMENT
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⁵⁴ (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.)

⁵⁵ (Corbett, What is the Second Death? Part 6, Harmony, 2017)

4:14	¹³ Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”	Jesus is the giver of eternal life.
5:24-29	²⁴ “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. ²⁵ Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.	Those who have done what is good (<i>see John 3:16</i>) will live and those who have done evil will be condemned to death. Death is the very condition those who have eternal life have escaped from. For more on the resurrection of the dead from their graves (Hades/Sheol) see the discussion on Revelation in the next section.
10:28	²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.	Those with Jesus gain eternal life. Those who are not with Jesus perish. It is as though John was emphasising the point.

Figure 6: Comparisons of eternal life and death in John

Conclusion on Jesus Teaching

Jesus teaches a lot more about judgement than can be discussed within the scope of this paper. The language that Jesus and the writers of the gospels use highlight a contrast between life forever or death forever. Death is understood as an end of life throughout the Old Testament. The New Testament does refer to those alive but not believing in Jesus as dead (John 5:25 also Ephesians 2:1, Colossians 2:13 and others). This can be referred to as spiritual death. This refers to those who are currently alive and who will face the second death (see discussion on Revelation) if they do not repent and believe in this life as opposed to a state of being that the ungodly will face in hell.

The conclusion from Jesus’ teaching then is that CI is a valid interpretation of these passages considering the Old Testament understanding of death, the end of the wicked, fire, worms and destruction.

A Note on Hell and the Atonement

Though this goes beyond the scope of this paper it is important to highlight that CI provides a good framework for regarding Jesus’ atonement for sin. For those who hold to penal substitutionary atonement, CI makes logical sense regarding biblical justice. It can also be argued that CI makes sense of all the various views of atonement e.g. Jesus is victorious over death and Jesus removes the fear of shame.

Jesus’ death no longer needs extra-biblical judicial frameworks to justify how one death can save us from an eternal conscious torment. Jesus died but death could not hold him (Romans 1:4). Hell,

being the second death, consumes those who are not in Christ (see discussion on Revelation in next section). Christ, being perfect, was not consumed by the second death and instead, defeated it once and for all (Isaiah 53:6, 1 Cor 15:55). The Christian need no longer need fear death, all death, as Jesus, logically and scripturally has taken the place of the believer (Isaiah 53:4, 1 Peter 2:24).

Hell in the New Testament

This final section will summarise themes within the New Testament but will not cover every verse that hints at judgement or hell. The key texts used against CI will be discussed, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine this in detail due to whole articles being written about the two texts from Revelation. Though much can be gained from the study of Revelation, it takes more than just a cursory glance of verses to understand what is being said. This section will show that CI is an orthodox conclusion from the various writings of the New Testament authors.

Paul and John

Paul's point in Romans 6 is to emphasise that to be in Christ is life and to be in sin is death. He uses this as a motivation for no longer sinning. Sin in this life is not banished, but there is a hope for resurrection (vs 5). If while we are alive (present life) we believe in Christ, we will live with him after dying in this life (vs 8). For those who do not believe in Christ in this life, sin reigns in their mortal bodies (vs 12) and so when they die, they will be judged, and the result is death (vs 21). Paul states in verse 23:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul's emphasis in chapter 6 (backed up by 2:7, 5:21) shows an understanding that the contrasts in Jesus' teachings are between death and life. It is clarified further by his teaching in 1 Corinthians 15:54, *"when the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality"*. Again, Paul writes in Philippians 1:28, that those who oppose the Philippians should not be feared because *"they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved – and that by God"* (see also Philippians 3:19).

The opposite of life being death is not necessarily debated by those who hold to ECT, but a different interpretation of the word 'death' is used. As stated throughout this paper, the Old Testament and the gospels show that death is the end, not an eternal state of some form of consciousness. An eternal state of consciousness would imply a form of immortality and Paul states, as discussed in the first section, that only God has immortality (1 Timothy 6:16). As also discussed, God only shares his immortality with those who believe in Jesus (John 3:16). Death is exactly what is logical – the absence of life and the separation from the giver of life (1 Tim 6:13, Psalm 73:27). This is exactly what the New Testament continues to emphasise as we see in 1 John.

"The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:17)

and

"Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." (1 John 5:12)

Both Paul and John agree with Old Testament language that death is contrasted with life and death is synonymous with destruction (see Matt 10:28). As if this was not clear enough, Peter and Jude both write to clarify what destruction for the wicked looks like.

2 Peter and Jude

2 Peter and Jude both use similar imagery with regards to hell.

2 Peter 2:4-6:

"⁴For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, (Greek Tartarus) putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; ⁵if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; ⁶if he

condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;”

Peter uses the word Tartarus. This is the only use of the word in Scripture and it refers to angels rather than humans. The first verse should not be interpreted as a description of what all sinners deserve or where the ungodly will go. Though the Greek mythology surrounding the word often refers to the imprisonment of divine beings, Kim Papaioannou argues from Scripture and contemporary sources that Tartarus refers to the earth rather than Greek mythology. This argument agrees with other parts of Scripture which refers to those on earth as walking in darkness (Isaiah 9:2) and in 2 Peter 1:19, Scripture is a light in a dark place (earth). It also accords with the concept that the air is the domain of Satan (Ephesians 2:2).⁵⁶

Jesus states in Matthew 25 that the eternal fire was prepared for the devil and his angels and that is what the ungodly will experience as punishment. It can be argued then that the angels are imprisoned on this earth with no escape and then sent to the lake of fire to be destroyed. What happens to the angels does go beyond the scope of this paper and so the discussion must focus on what happens to humanity.

Peter does make clear what will happen to the ungodly. Genesis 19, as was discussed in the Old Testament section of this paper, showed that no living thing was left after its destruction by eternal fire. Ash is the inanimate, non-living result of eternal fire. It may also be that Peter was joining Genesis 19 with Malachi 4:3. The ungodly will be ash, trampled under the feet of the righteous. Note that CI allows for the existence of the ungodly as ash, corpse or a ruin and these may well be a memorial for God’s victory. CI argues that the ungodly will not be conscious after their punishment is carried out.

2 Peter 3:6-13:

⁶By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

⁸But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. (Some manuscripts “be burned up”)

¹¹Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹²as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

Noah was saved from the deluge that destroyed the wicked of his day. In a similar way, the day of judgement will lead to the destruction of the ungodly by fire. This is not just a single verse but a whole chapter that talks about judgement and the burning up of everything including the wicked. It is only those who are saved by God who can look forward to the new heaven and new earth where only righteousness dwells.

⁵⁶ (Papaioannou, 2013)

To clarify the point here, righteousness is that which is without unrighteousness. There is no sin or evil present in the new heaven and new earth, therefore there can be no immortalised sinners writhing in eternal pain in some section of existence called hell. The traditionalist must argue that death, even the second death, exists beyond God's renewal of all creation despite the bible stating that death will be defeated and there will be no more death in the end (see Isaiah 25:6-9, 1 Corinthians 15:26 and Revelation 21:4).

Jude 1:7:

⁷In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

To show that it was not just one author being unclear, the Holy Spirit made it clear to Jude that Paul, John and Peter, and the Old Testament were all in unison. The complete and utter annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah is an example of that which will happen to those who are not found in Christ once they have been judged and deemed guilty and deserving of punishment. The clarification needs to be made that to suffer the punishment of eternal fire will be like an eternal form of capital punishment. The person suffers, but the suffering comes to an end and they will be no more (see Psalm 37).

Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 1:9 is often cited to argue for ECT but when considered in tandem with Old Testament Scripture (as stated before, many arguing for ECT ignore the Old Testament completely) it is another brick laid in the scriptural structure of CI.

1 Thessalonians 1:6-9:

⁶God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might"

The discussion around Hebrews will focus more on what is meant by "everlasting destruction" though by now the reader may be able to see the CI position in that death is everlasting in the sense there will never be any life. This is an echo of the phrase used in Psalm 37 that "*sinners will be destroyed, there will be no future*".

Further debate is had by the phrase "shut out from" or "away from" (ESV). This is an odd debate in that it focuses on a single phrase rather than the entire sentence. Those who are destroyed are "are away from" the "giver of life" aka. Jesus⁵⁷. If you are shut out, cut off (an alternative meaning for destroy) or away from that which sustains life and holds all things together⁵⁸ then you will be destroyed until you are no more.

This passage is about the second coming of Christ and there is more to it than meets an initial reading and a short commentary. Eternal torment is not a conclusion that can be made from the text without reading the idea into the text first. The judgement and punishment will coincide with Jesus' return and the righteous will be the ones who remain (not destroyed) in Jesus' fiery presence.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ John 6:33 and repeated throughout the Bible

⁵⁸ Colossians 1:16-17

⁵⁹ Peter Grice goes into far more depth than I can in the scope of this paper. Suffice to say, eternal torment is not in view at all regarding Thessalonians. (Grice, 2016)

Hebrews

Hebrews brings clarity to the usage of the word “eternal” as well as the phrase “fire that consumes”. Peterson states, “we do not want to read our ideas into the Bible, but to get our ideas from the Bible.”⁶⁰ This paper agrees, Hebrews clarifies other Scripture by using “eternal” with other words that are commonly interpreted as finite but with eternal consequences.

Hebrews 6:1-2

¹Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ²and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

“Eternal judgement” is linked with the “resurrection of the dead”. There is little debate between scholars regarding a single judgement. The judgement is completed in a moment in time and the results are eternal.

Hebrews 9:12:

¹²he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

“Eternal redemption” is for those who trust in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The result of redemption is life. The redemption (Jesus’ death) is completed in a moment in time and the results are eternal.

It is with these two passages in Hebrews above that we can bring further clarity to Matthew 25 and the phrase “eternal punishment”. The use of the word eternal in Hebrews does not mean that both redemption and judgement are ongoing as is argued for the punishment in Matthew 25. The punishment is destruction which will be completed in a moment in time, but the results will be eternal. See figure below which summarises the discussion.

ETERNAL REDEMPTION	Jesus death completed in a moment but the consequent life for those who believe is eternal.
ETERNAL JUDGEMENT	Judgement is carried out in a moment depending on who is in the book of life (Daniel 12, Revelation 20). The results are eternal.
ETERNAL PUNISHMENT	Punishment is carried out in a moment (duration can be open to debate), but the destruction is final, and the results are eternal.

Figure 7: Discussion of eternal in Hebrews and Matthew

This is a straight forward but consistent reading of the words, the verses and the passages. To emphasise the ECT argument, many use phrases like ‘eternal suffering’ and ‘eternal torment’ though these are not paired together in Scripture⁶¹ and only highlight a bias towards torment that Jesus didn’t use in his own teaching.

⁶⁰ (Peterson, 2014)

⁶¹ John Piper at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation states, “Could Lausanne say—could the evangelical church say—we Christians care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering? I hope we can say that. But if we feel resistant to saying, “especially eternal suffering,” or if we feel resistant to saying, “we care about all suffering in this age,” then either we have a defective view of hell or a defective heart.” The repetition of eternal suffering, a non-biblical phrase is problematic at best. (Piper, We Care about All Suffering in This Age - Especially Eternal Suffering, 2010)

Hebrews 10:26-31,39:

²⁶For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁹How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." ³¹It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

...

³⁹But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

If a person consumes an apple, the assumption is that the apple, for all intents and purposes, is no more. If a fire consumes a house, the assumption is that the house is no more. Though ash or a ruin remains, it no longer exists as a house. This is the case with the biblical view of consumption by fire (Ezekiel 28:18-19). Any human, being or object that faces God's fire is consumed by it and as the author of Hebrews writes in verse 39, they are destroyed by it. The final comment on this passage is that destroyed is past tense rather than active. God is not destroying the unsaved but will have destroyed them. An end to life is in view.

Revelation

Two main passages will be discussed but it must be said that there is much debate surrounding these two passages and this paper will not settle it. To repeat what has already been stated throughout this paper, Revelation must be read in light of the rest of Scripture. John's earlier writings give a contrast of life for those in Christ and death for those who are not. He agrees with all of Scripture up to this point. The two passages viewed here are often linked with Matthew to create a central argument for ECT which is then used against CI. As has already been discussed, the OT is often ignored in popular level responses to Universalism and CI or remains unconnected to the passages in Revelation.^{62,63} If the idea of progressive revelation is the reason for this disconnect, the Old Testament should be discussed, and an explanation given as to why the New Testament has changed how judgement and death should be understood.

Grudem, Pawson, Peterson and others use these two passages (Rev 14:11 and Rev 20:10) to interpret Jesus' teaching when their meaning is not as obvious as they are made out to be. Both passages need far more study and time than is often given. They should not be used as a short note in an argument and left for the reader to interpret as if the meaning is straight forward.

Before looking at passages, it should also be noted that John's introduction in Revelation 1:1 parallels Daniel 2 where both talk of a God reveals mysteries and makes things known. This is similar to how Joseph connected the 7 cows in the Pharaoh's dream to years and famine, "The seven good cows **are** seven years"⁶⁴. John interprets the symbols throughout Revelation and what seems to be obvious may not be so. One such example from Revelation is Revelation 5:8 where John writes, "and golden bowls full of incense, **which are** the prayers of the saints". When reading Revelation, we

⁶² Chris Date covers Revelation in far more detail than the scope of this paper allows: <http://rethinkinghell.com/2013/08/06/annihilation-in-revelation-part-1-worth-a-thousand-words/> and <http://rethinkinghell.com/2013/08/28/annihilation-in-revelation-part-2-in-with-the-old-in-the-new/>

⁶³ There are more in-depth discussions of Revelation such as Gregory K Beale's *John's use of the Old Testament in Revelation* that are still to be engaged with by this author.

⁶⁴ Genesis 41:26 emphasis added

need to view events and images as symbols to be interpreted rather than exact explanations of things that will happen. Just as seven healthy cows did not literally eat seven skinny cows after Pharaoh's dream so it will be with much of the vision John saw.

Revelation 14:

⁹And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

¹²Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

¹³And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!"

Verses 10 and 11 are often given as proof for the eternal suffering of the sinner and for the definition of "eternal punishment". As seen in the last section on Hebrews, this is not good exegesis for the phrase. If this is taken literally, these verses are specific to a group of people who receive a mark on their forehead or hand and worship the beast. Even if this did mean *all* sinners, the language is very similar to Genesis 19, Isaiah 66:24 and the writings of both Peter and Jude. It is with the weight of Scripture in mind, that this passage should be analysed. A reference that has not been discussed previously is Isaiah 34:8-10 which sounds very similar to what John is saying:

⁸Edom's streams will be turned into pitch,
her dust into burning sulphur;
her land will become blazing pitch!
¹⁰**It will not be quenched night or day;
its smoke will rise for ever.**
From generation to generation it will lie desolate;
no-one will ever pass through it again."

Throughout Scripture, burning, fire and smoke are shown to cause complete destruction. Edom is not still burning, and smoke is not still rising. Verse 11 does have its difficulties when read at a surface level without any understanding of Revelation and if the Old Testament is ignored.

John interprets the symbols in verse 11 as he uses the same symbols with reference to Babylon. Babylon faces a cup that will 'repay her double for her deeds' (18:6), 'she will be burned up with fire' (18:8), there will be weeping over 'the smoke of her burning' (18:9) and those looking on will 'stand far off, in fear of her torment' (18:10). Finally, she 'will be found no more' (18:21) and her smoke 'goes up forever and ever' (19:3). Torment, and a smoke that lasts forever and ever, when discussed in revelation means that judgement has come and the one in judgement will be no more.

Many who argue against the CI position will tie Revelation 14:11 with Revelation 20:9-10 to claim that the Bible is then 'clear' that the resurrected ungodly will be tormented eternally. Before responding to such a claim, the entirety of Revelation 20 is included below with emphasis added to the most referenced verses relevant to the discussion.

Revelation 20:

¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ²And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

⁴Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

⁷And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹**And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.**

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. **And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.**

¹³**And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.**

The first 8 verses show that the reader of this chapter must be wary of taking a very literal interpretation of the rest of the chapter. Revelation 20:10 is often used to highlight the torment of those in hell but when it is taken in the whole of its context, this verse is again, only for a select group as opposed to all sinners. Verse 9 points out that the enemies gathered for battle are consumed. This denotes that they are no more. It is only the devil and the false prophet that seem to be tormented forever. This does seem state an eternal torment but there is a complexity here as other parts of the bible seem to contradict this conclusion. For example, Ezekiel 28:18-19, though a lament to the fall of the King of Tyre, has a prophetic aspect which has the devil in view. Verse 19 hints that the king and potentially the devil, "will be no more forever". Therefore, using these verses to interpret what eternal punishment is remains highly problematic. Given what has already been discussed regarding Babylon, it is also difficult for a traditionalist to argue that the meaning of smoke and torment must be different in Revelation 20 than what is plain in Revelation 18 and 19.

When verses 13-15 are in view, the case for CI is strengthened. John states what the lake of fire is: "This is the second death, the lake of fire". Death has been well defined throughout Scripture as this paper has shown. Those who are not in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire. Notice that "Death and Hades" are thrown into the fire, an act which means death does not exist in the new

creation. This end of death is acknowledged by some proponents of ECT, but no comment is made as to verse 15 where the wicked are also thrown into the lake of fire.⁶⁵

The weight of Scripture as shown by this paper leans towards the final destruction of the unbeliever. This is a punishment all deserve (Romans 3:23-24) but, by the grace of God, Jesus took our punishment and defeated death so that our names may be written in the book of life. Though there are two verses (Rev 14:11 and Rev 20:10) that seem to suggest some form of ongoing torment when taken literally, they do not show a fate for all unbelievers. When taken as symbols to be interpreted, John shows clearly that these verses do not denote never ending torment at all but a destruction where they will be no more. If eternal torment can be viewed as a biblical view of hell from two verses in Revelation, there should be no debate that CI is an orthodox view due to the hundreds of verses, from Genesis to Revelation, that have been discussed in this paper.

Conclusion

This paper's scope was to provide a scriptural basis for the view of Conditional Immortality. It has shown there is a theme of humanity's immortality being conditional on God's intervention rather than an innate immortality. Through the Old Testament the language of fire, worms and destruction has shown a consistent view of the wicked coming to an end and the righteous living forever and having a future. Through Jesus' teaching he heavily relies on the language in the Old Testament to teach about the judgement and wrath that faces the ungodly. Though some of the language is not directly linked to CI or ECT, the scriptures behind much of the debated passages such as Mark 9 link to a view of corpses and smoke from destruction rather than the torment of those who are conscious. This paper also states that these passages should be viewed in light of less ambiguous teaching such as Jesus in Matthew 10:28 where Gehenna is the place where the soul and body are destroyed. The New Testament authors continue this theme, using language of destruction and fire that consumes rather than a torment that lasts forever. 2 Peter and Jude specifically state that the fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah is an example of what will happen to the ungodly. Finally, there are three passages that seem to imply a continual torment, this paper only discusses them lightly but calls for further study rather than using them as a proof-text to be read into other parts of the bible.

There are significant implications if the majority view were to shift to CI. Creeds like the Westminster Confession of Faith⁶⁶, that have been used for centuries would require review. It would also require many prominent teachers to disregard years of teaching, a humbling task for any teacher. Despite this, those who hold to Sola Scriptura should see this as an opportunity for further reformation as Greek thought no longer holds sway over the word of God. These significant changes may cause some to remain loyal to a traditional reading of the scriptures regarding hell. The weight of tradition is considerable and therefore CI and ECT will be prominent views until Jesus returns.

This paper hints at the good news of judgement day. Death is the last enemy to be defeated. Death is not an everlasting consciousness in torment but an end. Death in this life leads to being resurrected to judgement. Those in Christ ("the book of life") will receive eternal life, and those not in Christ, the second death. The weeping and gnashing of teeth will follow the judgement as the punishment is carried out. Finally, the punishment will destroy all those remaining in rebellion against Christ, all evil and death and Hades itself will be consumed (Revelation 20:14). The believer can look forward to an eternal existence in the presence of God, in a new heaven and earth, where no sin and no death and no devil exist (Isaiah 25:8, Rev 21:4).

⁶⁵ David Pawson acknowledges this in his book *The Road to Hell* but ignores verse 15. (Pawson, 1996)

⁶⁶ Westminster Confession of Faith (accessed 4/01/09)

https://reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/index.html?body=/documents/wcf_with_proofs/ch_XXXII.html

Conditional Immortality is an orthodox conclusion to make from Scripture as shown throughout this paper. The Bible doesn't compare good news and bad news but simply life and death. From the Garden of Eden through to Revelation, the result of sin was death and the solution was Jesus dying so that we might live forever in right relationship with God. John 3:16 is still the most straight forward way to point someone to the gospel and with the overview of Scripture now discussed, perish doesn't require further interpretation.

Postscript - A Note on the History of CI

This is not a new reading of the Scriptures and it is important to highlight that there is a long tradition of views agreeing with CI. This paper argues that it goes back to Genesis! Various people have researched the history of CI and for those interested in this research, see rethinkinghell.com or read Edward Fudge's, *The Fire that Consumes*.

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