

Foreword to Third Edition

SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF its first edition in 1982, Edward Fudge's book *The Fire that Consumes* has been the fullest and most thorough exposition and defense of the view that the fate of the unsaved will be final destruction, not (as in the traditional doctrine of hell) eternal torment. In the meantime the issue has been more widely discussed among Evangelical Christians than ever before and the view that Fudge advocates is undoubtedly now favored by more Evangelical Christians than ever before. Some prominent Evangelical leaders have endorsed it and there is a widespread sense that this is an issue on which discussion and disagreement among Evangelical Christians is entirely legitimate.

A new edition of the book is therefore amply justified, especially as Fudge's work has been frequently cited and critiqued by those who have defended the traditional doctrine. He has taken the opportunity to engage with these critics and thereby to clarify and strengthen his case at many points. He also chronicles the main developments—the growing acceptability of conditional immortality and the controversies and discussions—that have occurred since 1982.

A major strength of Fudge's work, in my view, is that he takes full account of the Old Testament and the continuity in concepts and images of divine judgment between the two testaments. It is all too easy to suppose that, because the Old Testament rarely speaks of judgment after death, it is largely irrelevant to the issue of hell. That view is too simplistic and ignores the New Testament's pervasive allusions to the Old Testament in its treatment of this, as of every other, topic. Here, as in every respect, we need a truly biblical, not a purely New Testament theology. This is not to downplay the importance of Second Temple Judaism as the immediate context within which Jesus and the New Testament writers thought and taught, for the Jewish tradition was overwhelmingly one of exegesis and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. When New Testament writers reflect the Judaism of their time, they are engaged with it in reading and understanding the Old Testament Scriptures.

Fudge's work is very focused. He himself puts it thus: "One issue alone divides traditionalists and conditionalists: Does Scripture teach that God will make the wicked

immortal, to suffer unending conscious torment in hell? Or does the Bible teach that the wicked will finally and truly die, perish, and become extinct forever, through a destructive process that encompasses whatever degree and duration of conscious torment God might sovereignly and justly impose in each individual case?" His consistent focus on this issue is what enables him to deal so fully and thoroughly with all the relevant texts and the discussions of their interpretation. In my view, we very much also need a fully theological study of the wider contexts and implications of this particular issue within biblical theology. Especially I find it impossible to ignore its relationship to the doctrine of God. But not everything can be done at once and we can be very grateful for what Fudge has achieved.

I commend this book warmly. It is likely to remain a standard work to which everyone engaged with this issue will constantly return.

Richard Bauckham
Cambridge, England, 2011

Foreword to First Edition

WHILE THE SUBJECT OF this study by Mr. Fudge is one on which there is no unanimity among evangelical Christians, it is at the same time one on which they have often engaged in fierce polemic with one another.

If there is no unanimity here among people who are agreed in accepting the Bible as their rule of faith, it may be inferred that the biblical evidence is not unambiguous. In such a situation polemic should have no place. What is called for, rather, is the fellowship of patient Bible study. It is the fruit of such study that Mr. Fudge presents here.

All immortality except God's is derived. The Father, who has life in himself, has shared with the Son this privilege of having life in himself. All others receive life in the Son. This is true in a measure even of natural life. "In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind." But it is of spiritual and eternal life that we are now thinking.

Nor are biblical writers alone in insisting that God only has inherent immortality. Plato in the *Timaeus* points out that, if there is a morally good creator of the world, then all souls apart from himself exist by his will, even if his will decrees their immortality. It is a truism that Plato's teaching has profoundly influenced Christian anthropology. But the main difference between Plato's teaching and the biblical doctrine lies here: whereas Plato predicates immortality (albeit derived immortality) of the soul, when the New Testament writers speak of immortality in relation to human beings they predicate it of the body—of the body revived or transformed in the resurrection age.

Christian theologians chiefly disagree over the destiny in the Age to Come of those who live and die without God. The New Testament answer to this question is much less explicit than is frequently supposed. Paul is reported in Acts as declaring before Felix that he looked for "a resurrection of both the just and the unjust." But the only resurrection on which he enlarges in his letters is the resurrection of believers, viewed as their participation in the resurrection of Christ. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again" provides a far more secure basis for the Christian hope than any theory of the innate immortality of the soul, but it throws little light on the destiny of unbelievers.

It gives me pleasure to commend Mr. Fudge's exposition of this subject. All that he has to say is worthy of careful consideration, but there is special value in those chapters where he examines the testimony of successive sections of the Holy Scriptures.

I suppose that, as the terms are defined in this work, I would be regarded as neither a traditionalist nor a conditionalist. My own understanding of the issues under discussion would be very much in line with that of C. S. Lewis. Lewis did not systematize his thoughts on the subject (and I have not done so either); Mr. Fudge would no doubt ask (and rightly so) if our exegetical foundation is secure.

"It is a fearful thing," we are assured by the writer to the Hebrews, "to fall into the hands of the living God." True—and yet into whose hands could anyone more confidently fall? King David knew how fearful a thing it was; but when it came to the crunch, he made the right choice: "Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great." Christians have the assurance, both for themselves and for others, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will never do anything unjust or unmerciful: he cannot deny Himself.

F. F. Bruce
Manchester, England, 1982

Foreword to Second Edition

FOR SIXTY YEARS I have believed and taught what Edward Fudge so lucidly expounds in this book, but in all these sixty years it has been difficult in Britain to get hold of any publication which sets out the case for conditional immortality in a thorough and systematic way. Now this book, first published in the United States in 1982, has become available in a British edition, which has been skillfully revised and slightly abridged by Peter Cousins.

Christians in general and evangelicals in particular have in recent years become confused about the inspiration of the Bible and it has become all too easy to let the awful doctrine of hell disappear from sight in this general confusion. Fudge believes in the inspiration of the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments without reserve and has researched the whole subject with painstaking care, trying to extricate the pure doctrine of the Bible from the accretions of later centuries. Fudge's clear-headedness and fair-mindedness are apparent throughout. He rejects the notion that humans have immortality without new birth, they *gain* immortality by becoming partakers of the nature of the God "who alone has immortality." The terror of the fires of hell is that they burn up all that is unfit for heaven. God's world in the end will have no place where sinners live on unreconciled to their maker; all will be light and glory.

I believe that this book will help many to worship God more wholeheartedly and to proclaim the gospel more confidently.

John Wenham
Oxford, England, 1994