

## Introduction

**T**HIS YEAR OF 2011 begins the thirtieth year since the publication of the original edition of *The Fire That Consumes*. University and seminary professors are teaching today who then were not yet born. That original edition was something of a groundbreaker. As mainline evangelicals, we were at home with the majority interpretation of hell as unending conscious torment (the “traditionalist” view), and we assumed that it was thoroughly biblical and beyond dispute.

For most of us, the understanding of hell as a place of total, everlasting destruction (the “conditionalist” view) was still completely new—as was the five-hundred-page case that *The Fire That Consumes* presented in its support. It was appropriate for the tone of that original edition to be didactic rather than argumentative.

### God’s Power and Glory

That was 1982, and God’s hand had been evident in this book from the beginning. Written by an unknown author with no prestigious institutional connection, and privately published by a small and obscure Verdict Publications, the original edition of *The Fire That Consumes* nevertheless carried a commendatory foreword by the highly-respected New Testament commentator, F. F. Bruce. The second, British, edition included a second foreword by John W. Wenham of Oxford. A new foreword by Richard Bauckham crowns this third edition.

The first printing sold out in five months and the publisher turned the book over to me. Two elders in my church cosigned a bank note to finance the second printing and, in view of all the circumstances, I registered the trade name “Providential Press” for this book alone. The Evangelical Book Club chose it as an Alternate Selection, and, since 1982, our gracious and sovereign God has used *The Fire That Consumes* to help stimulate a rethinking of hell around the world.

### My Weakness

The apostle Paul tells us that God sometimes uses what is foolish, weak, and despised in this world to accomplish his purposes and to glorify himself. This book provides one more

example. Six years after *The Fire That Consumes* was published, I received a doctorate in jurisprudence and began more than two decades of practicing law. When a major book defending traditionalism appeared with the title *Hell on Trial*, it seemed appropriate that at least one participant in the theological conversation should also be an attorney.

Some readers, learning of my profession but confused on the chronology, imagined a modern Simon Greenleaf and accorded me unwarranted respect. Little did they know that while researching and writing *The Fire That Consumes*, I was working as a typesetter in an Alabama print shop and serving as volunteer pastor for a thirty-person nondenominational congregation who regularly met in a renovated barn. Happily, none of those things presented any problem for God, whose providential arrangement of circumstances and timing of events accomplished results that would have been impossible through human planning, means and effort.

## Feedback

Since this book's publication in 1982, at least a dozen books have been written in response, in addition to multiple Master's theses and at least two doctoral dissertations, including one at the University of Oxford.

Throughout this new edition, I interact with seventeen traditionalist authors. In addition, I welcome every opportunity to present the conditionalist case at any school or church, and to interact in person with responsible persons of good will who hold a different view. My website is [www.EdwardFudge.com](http://www.EdwardFudge.com) and my email address is [Edward@EdwardFudge.com](mailto:Edward@EdwardFudge.com).

In the larger picture, all disputants in the present debate are on the same side. I hope always to treat all of God's image-bearers, and especially his children, with courtesy and respect. As believers, we all trust in, belong to, and seek to serve the same Lord Jesus Christ. God holds each of us accountable for how we handle the light we have been given, and for how we respond to new light that breaks forth from his holy Word.

## Profession Vindicated by Action

As evangelicals, we profess commitment to a high view of Scripture. Translating that commitment into our daily work is easier said than done, especially when, as here, we start our journey entangled in centuries of Catholic and Protestant traditions. For many Christians, those traditions are reinforced by denominational or ecclesiastical confessions and by institutional statements of faith. How we work through these competing interests will depend on, demonstrate, and/or determine the sincerity of our profession and the mettle of our commitment.

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