

Romans 14:19
So then let us
follow after things
which make for
peace, and things
whereby we may
edify one another.



John 8:32 and
ye shall know
the truth, and
the truth shall
make you free.

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Isaiah 66:24 — “...Where The Fire Is Not Quenched...”

Jim Everett

This is the seventh and final article in this series by Jim Everett on “Conditional Immortality”

Jesus so plainly affirms the resurrection of both the righteous and the evil that even the annihilationist cannot deny it, (**Jn 5:28-29**). But, having rejected the continued existence of the evil after the resurrection, they are forced to invent interpretations that try to reconcile the totality of revealed, inspired information and, in so doing, present some nonsensical explanations. For instance, the annihilationist views the resurrection of the evil as a time when God is going to kill them again and this time they will be killed forever — the spirit totally annihilated; totally nonexistent for eternity. God kills them as He casts their bodies into the valley of Hinnon where the maggots will eat them and fire will burn until the bodies have been consumed - “no pain, just shame,” they say.

Though annihilationists are forced to accept the plain truth that the unrighteous will be raised, they have a problem explaining why God is going to raise them and of what consequence it is for them to be raised, only to be annihilated again. So, in view of their belief system, their first dilemma is explaining why the evil will be raised. If, when man is killed, his soul ceases to exist, he has been annihilated. So why raise him to annihilate him again? Their second dilemma is trying to give an interpretation that explains away the ability of man to do what God can do — man can kill the body; God destroys both in hell (**Mt 10:28**). But, if when man kills the body, the

soul part of man is extinguished, that is, he is annihilated and ceases to exist, then man can do what God does and that makes their interpretations contradict what Jesus plainly said in **Matthew 10:28**.

To avoid the impact of Jesus’ teaching about hell and eternal punishment in the picturesque language, “*where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched*,” (**Mk 9:44-46**), opponents of eternal punishment try to explain away Jesus’ use of Isaiah’s description of the judgment (**Isa 66:22-24**).

Edward Fudge, a conditional immortalist, said, “*In chapter 66 Isaiah anticipates the same scene on a massive scale at the end of time. In this prophetic picture, as in the historical event of Isaiah’s day, the righteous view ‘the dead bodies’ of the wicked. They see corpses, not living people. They view destruction, not conscious misery. Discarded corpses are fit only for worms (maggots) and fire — both insatiable agents of disintegration and decomposition.*”

“*To the Hebrew mind, both worms and fire signify disgrace and shame (**Jer 25:33; Amos 2:1**). Worms and fire also indicate complete destruction, for the maggot in this picture does not die but continues to feed so long as there is anything to eat. The fire, which is not ‘quenched’ or extinguished, burns until nothing is left of what is burning. According to God’s prophet Isaiah, this is a ‘loathsome’ scene, which evokes disgust rather than pity (**Is 66:24**; see the same word in **Dan 12:2**). This scene portrays shame and not pain. This passage of Scripture says nothing*

about conscious suffering and certainly nothing about suffering forever.” (Fudge, Two views of Hell, pp. 32-33).

I must confess that my first reaction to reading Fudge’s interpretation was, *“So what — what difference does it make?”* And, I don’t mean that in reference to what God reveals through Isaiah but to what Fudge’s conclusions are. So what if the dead bodies are physically burned up and eaten by worms? What difference does that make to the spirits of those bodies which, according to Fudge, suffered for a moment while God killed the body and extinguished the soul into total annihilation? They were just as totally nonexistent, obliterated, gone forever, the moment the physical body could no longer sustain life. What happens to their bodies cannot matter when there is no consciousness. They certainly are not ashamed. Are the righteous who look on their bodies ashamed? Fudge’s explanation presents a vacillating manipulation of Jesus’ use of the text as he makes part of it figurative and then demands that the worms and fire be physical and literal so as to diminish the duration of eternal punishment. His conclusions make the final scene totally inconsequential to the condemned evil.

In reference to the context of **Isaiah 66:22-24**, Fudge had previously said, *“This symbolic picture of the future...”* Then when it comes to his interpretation of **v. 24**, he makes it both literal and physical, not symbolic. On the one hand, he symbolically interprets the statement *“...and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me...”* as *“Then the righteous and their descendants will endure forever, and ‘all mankind’ will worship God,”* (p. 32) — no actual, seventh-day, Sabbath keeping as he views it. Then, he makes the bodies, maggots and fire literal and physical. When Fudge finishes his interpretation of **Isaiah 66:22-24**, the worm that cannot die, dies; the fire that is not extinguished is extinguished.

The annihilationist is not justified in inserting concepts into the picture Isaiah gives us of the final judgment that contradict the message. Fudge inserts *“until the corpses are gone”* to qualify how long his physical maggots live and the physical fire burns and, in so doing, takes issue with the very time frame reference as Jesus used the terms to describe *“eternal”* punishment. According to Fudge’s position, it certainly does not matter to the evil how long it takes for their dead bodies to be consumed, for they are long gone, obliterated and non-existent with no awareness of pain or shame. Nor would it matter to them how loathsome their bodies are to the righteous.

Fudge also said, *“It is inexcusable to interpret language from this text, whether quoted directly or*

indirectly from the mouth of Jesus (Mk 9:48), to give a meaning diametrically the opposite of Isaiah’s clear picture. Yet that is exactly what traditionalist interpreters have done without exception, down to the present day,” (Ibid.). One could just as appropriately say that **Joel 2:28-30**, says nothing about Holy Spirit baptism and it is inexcusable to interpret the language of the text so as to apply it to Holy Spirit baptism (**Acts 2:16-21**). Or, since **Psalms 2:9**, says nothing about the resurrection, Paul’s use of it as applying to Jesus’ resurrection is an inexcusable error (**Acts 13:34**). But Fudge is really reversing the process of interpreting prophetic language. Proper interpretation of prophetic language should arise from the inspired application of the prophecy and not the reverse.

Similarly, when Jesus used the terminology of **Isaiah 66:22-24**, He certainly would understand the intent and meaning of the language since he was the one who spoke through Isaiah. Then, when he became flesh his application of that prophetic language in **Mark 9:42-47**, makes **Isaiah 66:22-24** clear, because it comes from his understanding of an eternal hell and its eternal punishment. Who is Fudge to forbid Jesus using prophetic language exactly as the apostles did?

So, how is this context to be understood? Obviously, it involves figurative language. But figurative language must have its background in that which is real. To paint a picture of the final judgment and the condition of both the righteous and the unrighteous, Isaiah draws from what Israel would understand in their physical history — events, for instance, like **Isaiah 37:36**. The conveying of eternal existence can be described only in terms with which physical man, in his own experience, can identify. Hence, we are limited in our comprehension of things that are beyond our existence and experiences. The warnings about hell are designed to say that it is so terrible that man should do whatever it takes to avoid it.

Fear can be an appropriate motivation to turn men from their sins, when they are truly aware that they will stand accountable before a just God who, necessarily, will reap vengeance upon evil men (**Heb 10:28-29**). But annihilation is not punishment — it is merely nonexistence. When men “water down” hell by their philosophical theories they annihilate a God-given restraint of evil. And, in so doing, they also create an unbalanced perspective about God. In magnifying the love of God, they diminish his justness — God is not only love, but, in his justness, is also a God who must punish evil.

It matters not how strenuously one may argue to try to shorten eternal punishment or how vigorously he may seek to diminish the pain quotient, hell still is

hell. If the “conditional immortalist” is correct, then the unrighteous will suffer for only a moment and then be eternally snuffed out of existence — that will be a great comfort to them. However, if what I have affirmed is correct, then the annihilationist view is one of the greatest deceptions ever fostered on man and those who embrace it will find out too late. The final, eternal punishment of the unrighteous that reject hell is just as inevitable as the ant’s that climbed upon the railroad track to challenge the existence of a locomotive. Denying the evidence will not change the facts.

Jim R. Everett taken from insearchoftruth.org

THE HEART OF MAN

“And He said, ‘What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man’ (Mark 7:20-23).

When Mark tells us that the Pharisees and scribes arrived from Jerusalem (**Mark 7:1**), we know that opposition to Jesus was increasing. Were some Jews sincere in their efforts to be clean? Probably. Their washings and avoiding contact with folks in the market place, etc., were nods to the Law of Moses. Still, the traditions of the elders seemed to be more important to these religious leaders. Elaborate ceremonial washings could involve all kinds of efforts to be clean. Vigorously pumping one hand into the other, using vast amounts of water, and making sure the dinnerware was clean were important aspects of serving God, at least to the Pharisees. Was Jesus concerned about such matters? Yes and no. Oral traditions meant to preserve the sanctity of the Law of Moses often went far beyond God’s original intent. Jesus quoted Isaiah and said: *“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites ... This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men--the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do ... you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.”* Traditions may be good; they become bad when they take the place of God’s word.

Jesus transitions to His greater concern: Defilement of the heart. Food may go into the stomach; that kind of food doesn’t defile. The trouble lies with what comes out of the heart. It is not that Jesus was opposed to someone washing their

hands. His concern is the heart. Not only do evil thoughts, adulteries, etc., defile the heart; Pharisaical mutilations of God’s will do the same. Individual violations of the Law that finds root in one’s thoughts and motives are evil; they defile those who so live. Jesus says: The way of the kingdom is INSIDE to OUTSIDE. Get your heart right and your life will follow. The transformed life is a life easily discerned by the Lord and by others (**Romans 12:1-2**).

The filth of this world means that we have a big challenge as we seek to guard our hearts. The media, the ever-present spectacle of pornography, the disgusting display of ungodliness from our nation’s leaders—these things, and more, can mitigate against a life of purity and dedication to Jesus. The devil works overtime to lure us away from the Lord—we must work overtime in our resistance to the devil’s onslaughts. Guarding the heart is always needful. *“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23).* *“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. Eat and drink!” he says to you, but his heart is not with you: (Proverbs 23:7).* You want to wash your hands before you eat? Go ahead. Remember, though, that defilement comes from within. Remember, too, that mere external observances can mitigate against true obedience to the Savior.

“The heart is the great workhouse where all sin wrought before it is exposed to open view. It is the mint where evil thoughts are coined, before they are current in our words or actions. It is the forge where all our evil works, as well as words, are hammered out. There is no sin but is dressed in the withdrawing room of the heart, before it appears on the stage of life. It is vain to go about a holy life till the heart be made holy” (The Biblical Illustrator, Matthew/Mark, Volume 11, 275). What will we do: Wash our hands or wash our hearts?

Randy Harshbarger

Heart is used in Scripture as the most comprehensive term for the authentic person. It is the part of our being where we desire, deliberate, and decide. It has been described as “the place of conscious and decisive spiritual activity,” “the comprehensive term for a person as a whole; his feelings, desires, passions, thought, understanding and will,” and “the center of a person. The place to which God turns.”

J. Stowell, *Fan The Flame*, Moody, 1986, p. 13.

Psalm 1:1 *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.*

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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the gospel - Romans 10:17

Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10