

Some Problems with Conditional Immortality and Annihilationism

1. "They have no rest day and night" (Revelation 14:11)

If "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever" (Revelation 14:11) means that, although unbelievers are annihilated, the evidence of their annihilation (the smoke) continues forever, then what does the next clause, "and they shall have no rest day and night" mean? The "day and night" appears to be correlated with the "forever and ever," i.e., "they have no rest day and night forever and ever"! How can these statements be squared with the assertion of the *annihilation* of these unbelievers?

2. The same terminology is used to describe the *endless* misery of hell and the *endless* happiness of heaven.

If the endless misery of hell is denied, then must the endless happiness of heaven also be denied, since the same terminology is employed to describe the *endlessness* of both states? For example, in Matthew 25:46-- "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

3. Spiritual death is not equivalent to annihilation of the soul/spirit; why should eternal death be equivalent to annihilation?

If spiritual death does not mean that the soul/spirit of an unregenerate human being is extinct or nonexistent, how does it follow that eternal spiritual death means that the soul/spirit of an unrepentant sinner in hell is extinct or annihilated? If a person can be spiritually dead while physically alive, why can't he or she continue to be spiritually dead following physical death and resurrection? Spiritual death does not equal extinction in this life; why should it in the eternal state?

4. How can such language as *eternal* fire, punishment, and destruction refer to momentary annihilation?

What can it mean for the New Testament to speak of *eternal* (αἰώνιος) fire, punishment and destruction if they really refer to *momentary* annihilation? J. I. Packer says that if all that is envisaged is momentary extinction, such language would be as pointless and inappropriate as it would be to dwell on unending pain resulting from an immediately fatal bullet wound!