



ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

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ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

I. Introduction

We take up our pen to write on one of the most solemn truths taught in the Word. And ere we began we turned to the Lord and earnestly sought that wisdom and grace which we are conscious we sorely need; making request that we might be preserved from all error in what we shall say, and that nothing may find a place in these pages which shall be displeasing to that Holy One “whose I am, and whom I serve” (Act 27:23). O that we may write in the spirit of one who said, “Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath” (Psa 90:11).

A. A Truth Lost in These Days

The subject before us is one that needs stressing in these days. The great majority of our pulpits are silent upon it, and the fact that it has so little place in modern preaching is one of the signs of the times, one of the many evidences that the Apostasy must be near at hand. It is true that there are not a few who are praying for a world-wide revival, but it appears to the writer that it would be more timely and more scriptural for prayer to be made to the Lord of the harvest, that He would raise up and thrust forth laborers who would fearlessly and faithfully preach those truths that are calculated to bring about revival.

While it is true that all genuine revivals come from God, yet He is not capricious¹ in the sending of them. We are sure that God never relinquishes His sovereign rights to own and to bless where and as He pleases. But we also believe that here, as everywhere, there is a direct connection between cause and effect—and a revival is the effect of a previous cause. A revival, like a genuine conversion, is wrought of God *by means of the Word*—the Word applied by the Holy Spirit, of course. Therefore, there is something more needed (on our part) than prayer: the Word of God must have a place, a prominent place, *the* prominent place. Without that there will be no revival, whatever excitement and activities of the emotions there may be.

It is the deepening conviction of the writer that what is most needed today is a wide proclamation of those truths that are the least acceptable to the flesh. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the *character of God*—His absolute sovereignty, His ineffable² holiness, His inflexible justice, His unchanging veracity.³ What is needed today

¹ **capricious** – guided by whim or fancy, not settled judgment.

² **ineffable** – incapable of being expressed; too great to be described in words.

is a scriptural setting forth of the *condition of the natural man*—his total depravity, his spiritual insensibility, his inveterate⁴ hostility to God, the fact that he is “condemned already” and that the wrath of a sin-hating God is even now abiding upon him (Joh 3:18, 36). What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the *alarming danger in which sinners are*—the indescribably awful doom which awaits them, the fact that if they follow only a little further their present course, they shall most certainly suffer the due reward of their iniquities. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the *nature of that punishment which awaits the lost*—the awfulness of it, the hopelessness of it, the unendurableness of it, the endlessness of it. It is because of these convictions that, by pen as well as by voice, we are seeking to raise the alarm.

It may be thought that what we have said in the above paragraph stands in need of qualification. We can imagine some of our readers saying, “Such truths as these may be needed by the lost, but surely you do not wish to be understood as saying that these subjects ought to be pressed upon the Lord’s people!” But that is exactly what we do mean and do say. Re-read the Epistles, dear friends, and note what place each of these subjects has in them! It is just because these truths have been withheld so much from public ministrations to the saints that we now find so many backboneless, sentimental, lopsided Christians in our assemblies.

A clearer vision of the awe-inspiring attributes of God would banish much of our levity and irreverence. A better understanding of our depravity by nature would humble us, and make us see our deep need of using the appointed means of grace. A facing of the alarming danger of the sinner would cause us to consider our ways and make us more diligent to make our calling and election sure (Hag 1:5; 2Pe 1:10). A realization of the unspeakable misery that awaits the lost (and that each of us fully merited) would immeasurably deepen our gratitude, and bring us to thank God more fervently that *we* have been snatched as brands from the burning and delivered from the wrath to come. And too, it will make us far more earnest in our prayers as we supplicate God on behalf of the unsaved.

Moreover, scriptural and searching addresses along these lines would, in some cases at least, lay hold of those who have a form of godliness, but who deny the power thereof (2Ti 3:5). They would have some effect on that vast company of professors⁵ who are “at ease in Zion” (Amo 6:1). They would, if God were depended upon, arouse the indifferent, and cause some who are now careless and unconcerned to cry, “What must I do to be saved?” (Act 16:30). Remember that the ground must be *plowed* before it is ready to be sowed; the truths mentioned above are needed to prepare the way for the gospel.

B. Importance of This Truth

Concerning the eternal punishment of the wicked, there are few, it seems, who realize the vital importance of a ringing testimony to this truth; and fewer still who appre-

³ **veracity** – truthfulness.

⁴ **inveterate** – habitual.

⁵ **professors** – those who profess belief in the Christian faith.

hend the deep seriousness of what is involved in a denial of it. The importance of a clear witness to this doctrine may be seen by noting what a prominent place it holds in the Word; and contrariwise, the seriousness of denying it is evidenced by the fact that such denial is a rejection of God's truth. The need of giving this solemn subject a prominent place in our witness is apparent, for it is our bounden duty to warn sinners of their fearful peril, and to bid them flee from the wrath to come (Mat 3:7). To remain silent is criminal; to substitute anything for it is to set before the wicked a false hope. The great importance of expounding this doctrine, freely and frequently, also appears in that, excepting the cross of Christ, nothing else so manifests the heinousness of sin—whereas every modification of eternal punishment only serves to minimize the evil of it.

We propose to deal with our present theme under the following divisions. First, we shall examine briefly some of the leading objections brought against the truth of eternal punishment. Second, we shall classify various passages that treat of the destiny of the lost, showing that death seals the sinner's doom, that his condition is then beyond hope, that the punishment awaiting him is interminable.⁶ Third, we shall examine those scriptures that throw light upon the *nature* of the punishment that awaits the lost. Finally, we shall seek to make a practical application of the whole subject.

II. Objections Considered

In taking up the objections made against the truth of eternal punishment, it would be a hopeless task were we to attempt to notice every argument that the fertile mind of unbelief (under the control of Satan, as it is) has devised. We shall, however, consider those of greatest weights, and those which have received the widest acceptance among unbelievers. These we shall classify as follows: first, deductions drawn from the divine perfections; second, passages appealed to by Universalists;⁷ third, passages appealed to by Annihilationists; fourth, assertions that punishment is not penal and retributive, but disciplinary and remedial.

A. Deductions Drawn from the Divine Perfections

1. *God is love.*

From this scriptural premise the conclusion is drawn that He will never cast any of His creatures into endless woe. But we must remember that the Bible also tells us that "God is light," and between light and darkness there can be no fellowship. Divine love is not a sentimental passion that overrides moral distinctions. God's love is a *holy* love, and because it is such He hates all evil; yea, it is written, "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Psa 5:5). Startling as it may sound, it is nevertheless a fact that the Scriptures speak much more frequently of God's anger and wrath, than they do of His love and compas-

⁶ **interminable** – that which cannot be terminated; endless; unending; without limit.

⁷ **Universalists** – those who believe that all people will go to heaven.

sion. Let anyone consult Young's or Strong's Concordance and they may verify this for themselves. To argue, then, that because God is love He will not inflict eternal torment on the wicked, is to ignore the fact that God is light, and is to asperse⁸ His holiness.

2. *God is merciful.*

Man may be a sinner, and holiness may require that he should be punished, but it is argued that divine mercy will intervene, and if the punishment be not entirely revoked, it is [nevertheless] imagined that the sentence will be modified and the term of punishment be shortened. We are told that the *eternal* torment of the lost cannot be harmonized with a God of mercy. But if by the mercy of God be meant that He is too tenderhearted to apportion such miseries to His creatures, then we might as logically reason that, seeing God's mercy, like all His attributes, is infinite, therefore none of His creatures will be permitted to suffer at all.

Yet this is manifestly erroneous. Facts deny it. His creatures *do* suffer, oft times excruciatingly, even in this life. Look out on the world today and mark the untold misery that abounds on every hand, and then remember that, however mysterious all this may be to us, nevertheless, it *is* all permitted by a merciful God. So, too, read in the Old Testament the accounts of the deluge, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone from heaven, the plagues upon Egypt, the judgments that were visited upon Israel, and then bear in mind that these were not prevented by the mercy of God! To reason, then, that because God is merciful He will not cast into the Lake of Fire everyone whose name is not found written in the book of life, is to fly in the face of all God's judgments in the past.

3. *God is just.*

It is often said it would be unjust for God to sentence any of His erring creatures to *eternal* perdition. But who are we to pass judgment upon the justice of the decisions of the All-Wise? Who are we to say what is consistent or inconsistent with God's righteousness? Who are we to determine what shall best vindicate⁹ the divine benevolence or equity? Sin has so enfeebled our power of righteous judgment, so darkened our understanding, so dulled our conscience, so perverted our wills, so corrupted our hearts, that we are quite incompetent to decide. We are ourselves so infected and affected by sin that we are altogether incapable of estimating its due merits. Imagine a company of criminals passing judgment on the equity and goodness of the law that had condemned them! The truth of the matter is—and how often is it lost sight of!—that God is not to be measured by human standards.

But have we realized that to deny the justice of eternal punishment is also to repudiate the grace of God? If endless misery be unjust, then exemption from it must be the sinner's right, and if so, his salvation could never be attributed to grace, which is unmerited favor! Moreover, to deny the justice of eternal punishment is to fly in the face of Christian consciousness, which universally witnesses to the fact that punishment, and

⁸ **aspersion** – slander; falsely accuse.

⁹ **vindicate** – to clear from criticism; to uphold by evidence.

only punishment, is all that *each* of us deserves. Moreover, if the sinner has despised and rejected eternal happiness, is there any reason why he should complain against the justice of eternal misery? Finally, if there is an *infinite* evil in sin, as there is, then infinite punishment is its due reward.

4. *God is holy.*

Because God is infinitely holy, He regards sin with infinite abhorrence. From this scriptural premise it has been erroneously concluded that, therefore, God will ultimately triumph over evil by banishing every last trace of it from the universe; otherwise, it is said, His moral character is gone. But against this sophistry¹⁰ we reply: God's holiness did not prevent sin entering His universe, and He has permitted it to remain all these thousands of years, therefore a holy God can and does co-exist with a world of sin!

To this it may be answered: There are good and sufficient reasons *why* sin should be allowed now. Quite so, is our rejoinder; and who knows *what* these reasons are? Conjecture we may; but who *knows*? God has not told us in His Word. Who, then, is in the position to say that there may not be eternal reasons—[even] necessities—for the continued existence of sin? That God will triumph over evil is most certainly true. His triumph will be manifested by incarcerating every one of His foes in a place where they can do no more damage, and where in their torments His holy hatred of sin will shine for ever and ever. The Lake of Fire, so far from witnessing to Satan's victory, will be the crowning proof of his utter defeat.

B. Passages Appealed to by Universalists

Universalists may be divided, broadly, into two classes: those who teach the ultimate salvation of every member of Adam's race, and those who affirm the ultimate salvation of all creatures, including the devil, the fallen angels, and the demons. The class of passages to which both appeal are verses where the words "all," "all men," "all things," "the world" are to be found. The simplest way to refute their contentions on these passages is to show that such terms are restricted, usually modified by what is said in the immediate context.

1. "All"

The issue raised by Universalists narrows itself down to the question of whether "all men" and "all things" are employed, in passages that speak of salvation, in a *limited* or *unlimited* sense. Let us, then, point to a number of passages where these general terms occur, but where it is impossible to give them an absolute force or meaning:

"And there went out unto him *all* the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were *all* baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins" (Mar 1:5). "And as the people were in expectation, and *all* men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not" (Luk 3:15). "And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold the same baptizeth, and *all* men come to him" (Joh 3:26). "And early in the morning he came again

¹⁰ **sophistry** – argumentation that is intentionally deceptive.

into the temple, and *all* the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them” (Joh 8:2). “For thou shalt be his witness unto *all* men of what thou hast seen and heard” (Act 22:15). “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of *all* men” (2Co 3:2).

In none of the above passages has “all,” “all men,” or “all the people” an unlimited scope. In each of those passages, these general terms have only a *relative* meaning. In Scripture, “all” is used in two ways: meaning “all *without exception*” (occurring infrequently), and “*all without distinction*” (its general significance), that is, all classes and kinds—old and young, men and women, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, and in many instances Jews and Gentiles, men of all nations. Very frequently the “all” has reference to all *believers*, all [who are] in Christ.

What we have just said concerning the relative use and restricted meaning of the terms “all” and “all men” applies with equal force to “all things.” In Scripture, this is another expression that often has a very limited meaning. We give a few examples of this: “For one believeth that he may eat *all things*: another, who is weak, eateth herbs” (Rom 14:2). “For meat destroy not the work of God. *All things* indeed are pure” (Rom 14:20). “I am made *all things* to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1Co 9:22). “*All things* are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient” (1Co 10:23). “Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you *all things*” (Eph 6:21). “I can do *all things* through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phi 4:13). In each of these passages, “all things” has a restricted force.

2. “World”

Another class of passages appealed to by Universalists are verses where “the world” is mentioned. But a careful examination of *every* passage where this term occurs in the New Testament will show that we are not obliged to understand it as referring to the entire human race, because in a number of instances it means far less. Take the following examples. “For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the *world*” (Joh 6:33). Mark that here it is not a matter of *proffering* “life” to the world, but of *giving* “life.” Does Christ “give life”—spiritual and eternal life, for that is what is in view—to every member of the human family? “If thou do these things, shew thyself to the *world*” (Joh 7:4). Here it is plain that “the world” is an indefinite expression—show Thyself in public, to men in general, is its obvious meaning here. “The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the *world* is gone after him” (Joh 12:19). Did the Pharisees mean that the entire human race had “gone after” Christ? Surely not.

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the *whole world*” (Rom 1:8). Must this mean that the faith of the Roman saints was known and spoken of by all the race of mankind? Did all men everywhere “speak” of it? Did one man out of every ten thousand in the Roman Empire know anything about it? “The word of the truth of the gospel...is come unto you, as it is in *all the world*” (Col 1:5-6). Does “all the world” here mean, absolutely and unqualifiedly, all mankind? Had all men everywhere heard the gospel? Surely the meaning of this verse is

that the gospel, instead of being confined to the land of Judea and the lost sheep of the house of Israel, had gone forth abroad without restraint into many places. “And *all the world* wondered after the beast” (Rev 13:3). That the reference here cannot be to all men without exception we know from other scriptures.

It will be seen, then, from the passages cited above, that there is nothing in the words themselves that compels us to give an unlimited meaning to “all men,” “all things,” “the world.” Therefore, when we insist that “the world” which is saved, and the “all men” who are redeemed, are the world of *believers*, and the “all men” [are those] who receive Christ as their personal Saviour—instead of interpreting the Scriptures to suit ourselves, we are explaining them in strict harmony with other passages. On the other hand, to give to these terms unlimited scope, and to make them mean “all” without exception, is to interpret them in a way that manifestly clashes with the many passages which plainly teach [that] there *are* those who will be finally lost.

3. Popularity

One other remark may be made upon Universalism before turning to our next subdivision, and that is, the very fact that Universalism is so popular with the wicked, is proof irresistible that it is not the system taught in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 2:14 tells us, “the natural man *receiveth not* the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” That the natural man *does receive* the teaching that everyone will ultimately be saved, is a sure sign it does not belong to “the things of the Spirit of God.” The wicked hate the light but love the darkness; hence, while they deem as “foolishness” the truth of God and reject it, they esteem as reasonable the devil’s lies and greedily devour them.

C. Passages Appealed to by the Annihilationists

Truth is one, consistent, eternally unchanged. Error is hydra-headed,¹¹ inconsistent and contradictory, ever varying in its forms. So determined are men to persuade themselves that the eternal punishment of the wicked is a myth, the enmity of the carnal mind has devised a variety of ways of ridding themselves of this truth that is so hateful to them. “God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Ecc 7:29). One of these inventions is the theory that at death the wicked pass into oblivion, and that after their resurrection and judgment at the Great White Throne, they are annihilated in the Lake of Fire. Incredible as this view appears, nevertheless it has had and still has many advocates and adherents; and what is even more unthinkable, the Word of God is appealed to in support of it. It is because of this that we make a brief notice of it here.

1. “Death”

The first class of passages to which they appeal are verses where “death” is mentioned. Death is regarded in the most absolute sense. Death they take to mean the pass-

¹¹ **hydra-headed** – *Greek mythology*: the hydra was a monstrous serpent with nine heads, and two would grow in place of one that was cut off.

ing from existence into non-existence; an utter extinction of being. Death is applied to the soul as well as the body. How, then, is this error to be met? We answer: by an appeal to God's Word. The meaning of a word is to be defined not from its derivation, not from its employment by heathen writers, not from the definition supplied by a standard English dictionary, nor from the lexicons—but from its usage in the Holy Scriptures. What, then, does “death” mean as used by the Holy Spirit?

Let us turn first to 1 Corinthians 15:36: “Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die.” Here is the Holy Spirit's illustration and type¹² of the death and resurrection of a believer. Now, does the living germ in the seed sown become extinct before it brings forth fruit? Surely not. There is a decaying, of course, of its outer shell; and therein lies the analogy with the death of man—but the living germ within dies not, otherwise there could be no harvest. Death, then, according to this illustration of the Holy Spirit, is not annihilation.

The same illustration was used by our Lord. Said He, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and *die*; it abideth alone: but if it *die*, it bringeth forth much fruit” (Joh 12:24). The stalk and ear of corn in harvest time are but the life-germ fully developed. So it is with man. The body dies; the soul lives on. Note how this comes out, unmistakably, in the Saviour's words as recorded in Matthew 10:28: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” The “soul” man is unable to kill! But God is able—and mark carefully the distinction—to *destroy* (not kill) both soul and body in hell.

2. “*Destroy*”

As the word “destroy” is another word misused and erroneously defined by the Annihilationists, a few words must be said upon it. As used in Scripture, the words “destroy,” “destruction,” “perish,” etc., never signify cessation of existence. In Matthew 10:6, one of the principle Greek words for “destroyed” is rendered “the *lost* sheep of the house of Israel.” Those Israelites had not ceased to be, but were away from God! In Mark 2:22 the same word is translated “marred” in connection with the “bottles” of skins that the new wine burst. So, too, the word “perish” never signifies annihilation in Scripture. In 2 Peter 3:6 we read, “The world that then was, being overflowed with water, *perished*.” The “world” that perished, whether the reference be to the pre-Adamic earth or the world destroyed by the Flood, was not reduced to nothing. When, then, Scripture speaks of the wicked as perishing and as being destroyed, it is in order to expose the error of those who assert that they have a gospel for those who die unsaved. That the wicked have “perished” excludes *all* hope of their subsequent salvation. 1 Timothy 5:6 tells us there is a living-death even now, “She that liveth in pleasure is *dead while she liveth*”—so will there be in eternity.

The absurdity and unscripturalness of Annihilationism is easily exposed. If at death the sinner passes out of existence, why resurrect him in order to annihilate him again? Scripture speaks of the “punishment” and “torment” of the wicked; but anyone can see

¹² **type** – a symbol representing something else with similar characteristics.

that annihilation is not these! If annihilation were all that awaits the wicked, they would never *know* that they *had* received their just deserts and the “due reward” of their iniquities (Luk 23:41)! Scripture speaks of degrees of punishment for the lost, but annihilation would make this impossible; annihilation would level all distinctions and ignore all degrees of guilt. In Isaiah 33:14 we are told, “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” So far from sinners being annihilated, they shall *dwell* with the devouring fire! Scripture speaks again and again of the “wailing and gnashing of teeth” of those who are cast into hell, and this, at once, gives the lie to those who affirm extinction of being.

D. Disciplinary Punishment?

1. Reason

There are those who allow that the wicked will be cast into hell, and yet they insist that the punishment is corrective rather than retributive. A sort of Protestant purgatory is invented, the fires of which are to be purifying rather than penal. Such a conception is grossly dishonoring to God. Some who hold this view make a great pretense of honoring Christ, yet in reality they greatly dishonor Him. If men who died rejecting the Saviour are yet to be saved, if the fires of hell are to do for men what the blood of the cross failed to effect, then why was the divine Sacrifice needed at all—all might have been saved by the disciplinary sufferings of hell, and so God could have spared His Son.

Again, if God compassionates His enemies and cherishes nothing but gracious designs of infinite pity toward those who have despised and rejected His Son, we may well ask, Then why does He take such dreadful measures with them? If loving discipline be all that they need, cannot divine wisdom devise some gentler measure than consigning them to the “torment” of the Lake of Fire for “the ages of the ages”? This is an insuperable¹³ difficulty in the way of the theory we are now refuting. But once we see that the Lake of Fire is the place of punishment, not discipline, and that it is divine wrath and not love that casts the reprobate into it, then the difficulty entirely disappears.

2. The blood of Christ?

Utterly inconsistent though it be, there are those who argue that the fires of hell owe their disciplinary efficacy to the blood of Christ. These enemies of the truth have been well answered by Sir Robert Anderson:¹⁴

“Such punishment, therefore, must be the penalty due to their sins; else it were unrighteous to impose it. If, then, the lost are ultimately to be saved, it must be either because they shall have satisfied the penalty, or else through redemption—that is, because Christ has borne that penalty for them. But if sinners can be saved by satisfying divine justice in enduring the penalty due to sin, Christ need not have died. If, on the other

¹³ **insuperable** – impossible to overcome.

¹⁴ **Sir Robert Anderson** (1841-1918) – The second Assistant Commissioner (Crime) of the London Metropolitan Police from 1888 to 1901. He studied at Trinity College (Dublin), was admitted to the bar, and became an intelligence officer, theologian, and writer.

hand, the redeemed may yet be doomed, though ordained to eternal life in Christ, themselves to endure the penalty for sin, the foundations of our faith are destroyed.

“It is not, I repeat, the providential or disciplinary, but the *penal* consequences of sin that follow the judgment. We can therefore understand how the sinner may escape his doom through his debt being paid vicariously,¹⁵ or we can (in theory, at all events) admit that he may be discharged on payment personally of ‘the uttermost farthing’ (Mat 5:26); but that the sinner should be made to pay a portion of his debt, and then released because someone else had paid the whole before he was remitted to punishment at all—this is absolutely inconsistent with both righteousness and grace.”¹⁶

3. Scripture

Again, if it be true that the damned in the Lake of Fire are still the objects of divine benevolence—that as the creatures of His hand, the Lord still looks upon them with the most benign regard, and the unquenchable fire is nothing more than a rod in the hand of a wise and loving Father—we ask: How can this be harmonized with the manner in which Scripture uniformly speaks of unbelievers? God has not left us in ignorance of how He regards those who have openly and persistently defied Him. Again and again the Bible makes known to us the solemn fact that God looks upon the wicked as cumberers of the earth, as repugnant to Him. They are represented as “dross” not gold (Psa 119:119); as worthless “chaff” (Mat 3:12); as “vipers” (Mat 12:34); as “vessels unto dishonor” and “vessels of wrath” (Rom 9:21-22); as those who are to be made the Lord’s footstool (1Co 15:27); as “trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 12) and therefore fit for nothing but the fire; as those who will be “spued out of the Lord’s mouth” (Rev 3:16), that is, as objects of revulsion. Some of these passages describe Jewish reprobates, others sinners of the Gentiles; some refer to those who lived in a by-gone dispensation, others belong to the present; some speak of men this side of the grave, some of those on the other side. One purpose in calling attention to them is to show how God regards His enemies. The estimate expressed in the above passages (and they might easily be multiplied) cannot be harmonized with the view that God still looks upon them in love and entertains only the most tender regards for them.

Another class of passages may be referred to in this connection. “For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy” (Deu 32:40-42). Can this be made to square with the theory that God has naught but compassion toward those who have despised and defied Him?

“Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also

¹⁵ **vicariously** – taking the place of another by substitution.

¹⁶ quoted from *Human Destiny*.

will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me” (Pro 1:24-28). Is this the language of One Who still has designs of mercy toward His enemies?

“I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment” (Isa 63:3). Weigh this carefully, and then ask if such treatment is meted out toward those unto whom the Lord cherishes nought but compassion.

Should it be said, Each of these passages is from the Old Testament, it would be sufficient to say, True, but it is the same God as the New Testament reveals, Who is there speaking. But consider one verse from the New Testament also. The Christ of God is yet going to say to men, “Depart from me, *ye cursed*, into everlasting fire” (Mat 25:41). Is it unthinkable that the Son of God would pronounce this awful malediction upon those who are merely appointed to a season of disciplinary chastisement, after which they will be forever with Him in perfect bliss!

Thus we have sought to show that the various objections brought against eternal punishment will not stand the test of Holy Writ; that, though often presented in a plausible form, and with the avowed intention of vindicating the divine character, yet, in reality, they are nothing more than the reasonings of that carnal mind which is enmity against God (Rom 8:7).

Having disposed of the principal objections brought against the truth of eternal punishment, we now turn to consider,

III. The Destiny of the Wicked

There is deep need for us to approach this solemn subject impartially and dispassionately. Let writer and reader cry earnestly to God that all prejudices and preconceptions may be removed from our minds. It ill becomes us to sit at the feet of Infinite Wisdom determined to hold fast to our foregone conclusions! Nothing can be more insulting to God than to presume to examine His Word, professing a desire to learn His mind, when we have already settled to our own satisfaction what it will say. Someone has said that we ought to bring our minds to the Scriptures as blank paper is brought to the printing press, that it may receive only the impress of the type. May such grace be vouchsafed to us all, that we may ever present our minds to the Holy Spirit’s teaching, that only the impress may be left which God has designed. May our only desire be to hear, “What saith the Lord?”

A. The Certainty of Their Judgment

It is written, “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27). This is one of the many verses that refute the errors of the Annihilationists, who make the judgment of the sinner to be, itself, death. But here, death and judgment are clearly distinguished: the one follows the other. The fact of a future judgment for sinners is established by numerous passages. In Ecclesiastes 11:9 we read, “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” Again, in Ecclesiastes 12:14 we are told, “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” The New Testament witnesses to the same truth: “He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained” (Act 17:31). The judgment itself is described in Revelation 20:11-15.

Of the certainty of this coming judgment we are left in no doubt: “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2Pe 2:9). It will be impossible for the sinner to evade it. Escape there will be none: “How can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Mat 23:33). Resistance, individually or collectively, will be futile: “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished” (Pro 11:21). No confederacy of His foes shall hinder God from taking vengeance upon them.

B. Death Seals the Sinner’s Fate

1. “Proof texts” explained

Scripture teaches plainly that man’s opportunity for salvation is limited to the period of his earthly life. If he dies unsaved, his fate is sealed inexorably.¹⁷ There are two passages in the New Testament most generally relied upon by those who affirm that there is for the lost a hope beyond death. These are both found in the First Epistle of Peter. A brief notice then shall be taken of them.

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing” (3:18-20). But these verses make no reference whatever to any preaching heard by those who had already passed out of this life. They simply tell us that the Spirit of God preached through Noah, while the ark was being built, to those who were disobedient; and because they refused to respond to that preaching, they are now “spirits in prison.” It was not Christ Himself Who “preached,” but the Holy Spirit, as is plain from the opening words of verse 19: “By which also”—the “by which” points back to “the Spirit” at the end of verse 18. That the Holy Spirit did address Himself to the antedeluvians¹⁸ we know

¹⁷ **inexorably** – unyielding; cannot be made to bend.

¹⁸ **antedeluvians** – those who lived before the Flood.

from Genesis 6:3, “my Spirit shall not always strive with man.” The Spirit strove through Noah’s preaching. That Noah was a “preacher,” we learn from 2 Peter 2:5.

The second passage is found in 1 Peter 4:6, “For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead.” But this need not detain us. The gospel *was* preached, not as now being preached, or will again be preached to them. That such passages as these are appealed to only serves to show how untenable and impossible is the contention they are supposed to support.

That death seals the doom of the lost, we may prove negatively by the fact—and this is conclusive of itself—that we have not a single instance described in either the Old Testament or the New of a sinner being saved *after* death. Nor is there a single passage that holds out any promise of this in the future. But there are passages that contain positive teaching to the contrary. Several of these are now submitted.

2. *What the whole Bible says*

We turn first to Proverbs 29:1: “He, that being often reprov’d hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that *without remedy*.” This is so explicit¹⁹ and unequivocal, it needs no words of ours either to expound or enforce it. Once the rebellious sinner is “cut off,” he is “without remedy.” Nothing could be clearer: at death his doom is sealed.

Again, in Matthew 9:6 we read, “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.” Why did not the Lord simply say, “The Son of Man hath power to forgive sins,” and then stop? That would have been sufficient reply to His critics. The only reason that we can suggest why the Saviour should have added the qualifying words, “The Son of man hath power *on earth* to forgive sins,” was because He would give us to understand that after a sinner leaves the “earth,” the Son of Man (Christ in His mediatorial²⁰ character) has not the “power” (or “authority,” as [the original Greek] *exousia* really means) to forgive sins!

A similar instance to the above is found in John 12:25: “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” Notice that the antithesis would be complete *without* the restricting words “in this world”: “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life shall keep it unto life eternal.” Again, we say, that the only reason we can see why Christ added the qualifying clause, “He that hateth his life *in this world* shall keep it unto life eternal,” was in order to show that destiny is fixed once we leave this world.

¹⁹ **explicit** – clearly expressed; with nothing remaining in doubt; unequivocal.

²⁰ **mediatorial** – referring to a go-between; “It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto Whom He did from all Eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.” (1689 London Baptist Confession 8.1; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY)

In 2 Corinthians 5:10, which speaks of believers, we have another example of this careful employment of qualifying language: “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body.” The saints are to be dealt with not merely according to what they have done, but that they may receive “the things done *in the body*.” What they have done after they left the body and prior to the resurrection is not taken into account.

In John 8:21, it is recorded how that Christ said to His enemies, “I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come.” Observe carefully the order of the last two clauses. Once they *died* in their sins, it was impossible for them to go to heaven. The solemn force of this verse comes out even more clearly if we contrast with it John 13:36: “Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me *now*; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.” Mark the absence of the qualifying “now” in John 8:21. To Peter it was said, as to a representative saint, “Thou shalt follow me [to heaven] afterwards”; but to the wicked, Christ declared, “Whither I go, ye *cannot come*”!

C. What Awaits the Sinner at Death

We naturally turn for light on this to the teaching of the Lord, for more was said through Him than through any other concerning the future of the wicked. Nor shall we turn in vain to the record of His words. In Luke 16 we find Him drawing aside the veil that hides from us what lies beyond death. He tells us of a rich man who died “and was buried” (v. 22); but he had not ceased to exist. So far from it, the Lord went on to say, “And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.” That Christ was here describing the actual experience of this rich man after death there is no good reason to doubt; to say otherwise, is to be guilty of blasphemously charging the Son of God with using language that He knew would mislead countless numbers of those who later would read the record of His words. No one who comes to this passage with an unprejudiced mind would ever suppose that it gave anything else than a plain and simple picture of what befalls the wicked after death. It is only those who have previously arrived at the foregone conclusion that there is no torment for the unbeliever after death, who approach this passage determined to explain away its obvious meaning—who rule out of it what is there and read into it what is not there.

“In Hades he lift up his eyes, being in torments.” The Greek word here translated “hell” is “Hades,” which is a generic term for the unseen world into which the souls of all pass at death. No doubt it is due to the fact that the souls of saints as well as sinners are represented as entering Sheol at death that caused the translators to render it “grave” in many instances. But the fact that in both the Hebrew and the Greek there is an entirely different word used for “grave” ought to have prevented such a mistake. The Holy Spirit has carefully preserved the distinction between the two terms throughout. A careful examination of every passage in the Old and New Testaments where these words occur will show that many things are said of the “grave” (Heb. *queber*; Gk. *mnemeion*) which could never be said of Sheol or Hades; and many things are said of the latter which are never predicated of the former. For example, both the Hebrew and Greek

words for “grave” occur in the plural again and again; Sheol and Hades never do so. The Hebrew and Greek words for “grave” are frequently referred to as the *possession* of individuals: “my grave” (Gen 50:5); “grave of Abner” (2Sa 3:32); “his own [Joseph’s] new tomb” (Mat 27:60); “The sepulchres of the righteous” (Mat 23:29), etc. In Genesis 50:5 we read, “In my grave which I have *digged* for me;” of *mnemeion* we read: “And he laid it in his own new tomb, which he had *hewn out* in the rock” (Mat 27:60). Sheol and Hades are never so referred to. The *body* enters *queber* and *mnemeion*, but it is *never* said to enter Sheol or Hades. Sufficient has been said to demonstrate that Sheol or Hades is *not* the grave. We may, therefore, confidently affirm that neither Sheol or Hades should ever be rendered “grave” or “the grave.”

Hades refers to the same place as Sheol. Their identification is unequivocally established by a comparison of Psalm 16:10 with Acts 2:27: “Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol” (Psa 16:10), is “Thou shalt not leave my soul in Hades” in Acts 2:27. But it is important to bear in mind that Sheol, or Hades, had two compartments, reserved respectively for the saved and the lost. And “between” these two, our Lord tells us there is “great gulf fixed” (Luk 16:26). The compartment we are now considering is that which receives the souls of the wicked. In this, Christ declares, is a “flame” that torments. This is in perfect harmony with the teaching of the Old Testament concerning Sheol. In Deuteronomy 32:22 we read, “For a *fire* is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest Sheol.”...

Returning then to the teaching of Luke 16, the experience of the wicked immediately after death, we read: “And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.” Here we have a sentient²¹ being, a conscious person, in a definite place, suffering there excruciatingly. He was in “torments.” So great was his anguish, he begged that one might “dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue” (v. 24). But such alleviation was denied him. He was bidden to “remember” how he had lived: a worshipper of mammon.²² Such, we are assured, will be the doom of every one that dies in his sins.

D. The Utter Hopelessness of the Lost

Thus far we have seen, first, that the judgment of the wicked is certain; second, that death seals their doom; third, that at death the souls of unbelievers go to Hades, into that compartment of the unseen world reserved for the lost, there to be tormented in the flame. There they remain until the judgment, when they shall be resurrected and brought before the Great White Throne to receive their final sentence. We, therefore, devote a separate section to show that after the wicked are brought out of Hades there is, even then, no hope whatever of their salvation.

The first scripture we appeal to in proof of this is John 5:28-29: “All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” This is the solemn announcement of the Son of God; let His words be well weighed. Here

²¹ **sentient** – that which feels; having the power of perception by the senses.

²² **mammon** – wealth; riches.

He tells us, briefly, what awaits the sum total of the dead. They are divided into two classes: they that have done good and they that have done evil. For the one there is the “resurrection of life”; for the other the “resurrection of damnation.” For evil-doers, there is no resurrection of probation and no resurrection of salvation; but simply and solely the resurrection of *damnation*. How this removes the very foundation on which any might desire to build a future hope for the wicked!

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13 we read, “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have *no hope*.” Here the apostle draws a contrast between the Christian grieving over the death of believing loved ones, and the heathen who mourned the loss of their dear ones. The Christian may sorrow over the departure of a saved relative or friend, but he can also comfort himself with the blessed hope presented to him in the Scriptures: the hope of being re-united at the coming of the Lord. This hope, the heathen—and the unsaved in Christendom who mourn the loss of unsaved friends—have not; yea, they have “*no hope*.” This is not weakened at all by the fact that, in Ephesians 2:12-13, we read of those once “without hope,” who had nevertheless been “made nigh by the blood of Christ.” The Ephesian scripture speaks of those alive in the world, and while *here* there is always a hope they may be saved; though while they remain unsaved they are “without hope,” that is, without any scripturally-warranted hope. But the Thessalonian passage speaks of those who have passed out of this world unsaved, and for them there is “no hope.” Whatever vain hopes the wicked may now cherish in the day to come, the very “expectation of the wicked shall perish” (Pro 10:28)!

Another scripture that proves the hopeless state of those who have rejected God’s truth is to be found in Hebrews 10:26-29, “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” For our present purpose we need not stop to consider of whom this passage is specifically speaking; sufficient to know that it treats of those who have willfully resisted the light. For these we are told, “There remaineth *no more* sacrifice for sins.” If there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, then they must themselves suffer the divine penalty for them. What that penalty is, this same passage tells us: it is “fiery indignation” that shall devour them. It is a judgment “*without mercy*.” It is a “punishment” sorer than that which befell him that despised Moses’ Law.

“For he shall have judgment *without mercy*, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment” (Jam 2:13). It is true that the apostle is here writing to saints, but in the verse we have just quoted there is a noticeable change in his language, and here he is obviously speaking of the unsaved. In the previous verse he had said “Ye,” but now he changes to “he.” He that hath showed no mercy (to his fellowmen) shall have

“judgment without mercy” from God; and this in spite of the fact that “mercy rejoiceth against judgment.” The last clause is plainly for the purpose of adding solemnity to what precedes.

Judgment “without mercy” is language that looks back to Isaiah 27:11, where we read, “It is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor.” If, then, this judgment is “without mercy,” how it closes the door against all possibility of a final reprieve, or even a modification of the dread sentence! And how it exposes the baselessness of that hope which is cherished by many, viz., that in the last great Day they think to cast themselves upon the mercy of that One Whom they now despise and defy—vain will it be to cry for mercy then! Of old God said to Israel, “Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.” So it will be at the Last Judgment.

One other Scripture may be considered in this connection: “Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever” (Jude 13). Unspeakably solemn is this. This verse is referring to the future portion of those who now turn “the grace of our God into lasciviousness”²³ and deny “the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). Unto them is reserved “the blackness of darkness forever”—the endless night of their doom shall never be relieved by a single star of hope. Thus have we sought to show that the Word of God, by a variety of expressions, each of which is unambiguous and conclusive, reveals the utter hopelessness of those taking part in “the resurrection of damnation.” We shall next consider,

E. The Last Abode of the Lost

This is given at least two different names in the New Testament: Gehenna and Lake of Fire. Let us now examine the teaching of Scripture concerning them.

1. Gehenna

First, Gehenna is the Grecianized form of the Hebrew for “valley of Hinnom,” which was a deep gorge on the east of Jerusalem. This valley of Hinnom was first used in connection with idolatrous rites (2Ch 28:3). Later it became a burial ground (Jer 7:31), or more probably a crematorium. Still later, it became the place where the garbage of Jerusalem was thrown and burned (according to Josephus²⁴). Its fires were kept constantly alight so as to consume the filth and rubbish deposited therein.

Second, this valley of Hinnom foreshadowed the great garbage-receptacle of the universe—hell; just as other places and persons in the Old Testament Scriptures adumbrated²⁵ other objects more vile, for example, the “king of Tyre” in Ezekiel 28. Just as what is there said of this king has in view one more sinister than he, so what is said of the valley

²³ **lasciviousness** – unbridled lust.

²⁴ Titus Flavius **Josephus** (AD 37 - c.100) – first century Romano-Jewish scholar and historian; born in Jerusalem; became interpreter to the Roman general Vespasian after the Roman-Jewish war ended in AD 67. His most important works were *The Jewish War* (c.75) and *Antiquities of the Jews* (c.94).

²⁵ **adumbrated** – exhibited a faint resemblance.

of Hinnom symbolized that which was far more awful. We can no more limit Gehenna to the valley outside of Jerusalem than we can restrict “the king of Tyre” to a mere man of the past.

Third, the valley of Hinnom our Lord used as an emblem of hell; and, stamped with the hallmark of His authority, [we have] the wider and more solemn scope of the word. It should be carefully noted that when speaking of Gehenna, He never referred to the mere literal valley outside of Jerusalem, but employed it to designate the place of eternal torments.

Fourth, Gehenna, in its New Testament usage, refers to a *place*. “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Gehenna” (Mat 5:29; *see also* Mat 18:9).

Fifth, the fire of Gehenna is *eternal*. “And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into Gehenna, into the fire that *never* shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mar 9:43-44).

Sixth, Gehenna is the place in which both *soul and body* are destroyed. “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Mat 10:28). This passage is most important, for more than any other it enables us to gather the real scope of this term. The fact that the “soul” as well as the body is destroyed there, is proof positive that our Lord was not referring to the valley of Hinnom. So, too, the fact that the “body” is destroyed there, makes it certain that “Gehenna” is not another name for “Hades.”

In pondering this solemn verse, we should remember that “destroy” does not mean to annihilate. Some have raised a quibble over the fact that Christ did not here expressly say that God *would* “destroy both soul and body in hell,” but merely said, “Fear him *which is able to*.” This admits of a simple and conclusive reply. Surely it is apparent on the surface that Christ is not here predicating of God a power that none can deny, but which, notwithstanding, He will never exert! He was not simply affirming the omnipotence of God, but uttering a solemn threat that will yet be executed. That such was His meaning is established beyond the shadow of doubt when we compare Matthew 10:28 with the parallel passage in Luke 12:5: “But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.” This threat we know *will* be fulfilled.

Seventh, Gehenna is *identical with the Lake of Fire*. There are four things that indicate this, and taken together they constitute a cumulative but clear proof. First, the fact that in Gehenna God “destroys” both *soul and body* (Mat 10:28). This shows the wicked who are there destroyed have already received their resurrection bodies.

Second, the fact that the fire of Gehenna is *eternal*: it will “never be quenched” (Mar 9:43). This is nowhere said of the fires of Sheol or Hades.

Third, in Isaiah 30:33 we learn that “Tophet” is ordained for “the king”—it is the king of Daniel 11:36, that is, the Antichrist, the Assyrian of Isaiah 30:31. Now “Tophet” is

another name for the valley of Hinnom, as may be seen by a reference to Jeremiah 7:31-32. In Revelation 19:20, we are told that the Beast (the Antichrist), together with the False Prophet, will be “cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.” Thus, by comparing Isaiah 30:33 with Revelation 19:20, we learn that Gehenna and the Lake of Fire are one and the same.

Finally, notice the *absence* of Gehenna in Revelation 20:14, “And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire”—the meaning of this is the people whom death and Hades had seized: “death” capturing the body, “Hades” claiming the soul. That the casting of “death and Hades” into the Lake of Fire refer to their captives is clear from the concluding words of the verse: “This is the second death,” i.e., for their victims. Note then that we are not told that Gehenna was cast into the Lake of Fire, because Gehenna and the Lake of Fire are one and the same place!

2. Lake of Fire

We shall now offer a few remarks upon the Lake of Fire and brimstone. The following analysis indicates the teaching of Scripture concerning it.

First, it is the place that finally receives the Beast and the False Prophet (Rev 19:20).

Second, it is the place that finally receives the devil (Rev 20:10).

Third, it is the place that finally receives *all* whose names are not found written in the book of life (Rev 20:15; cf. 21:8).

Fourth, it is a place of “torment” (Rev 20:10).

Fifth, it is a place whose torment is ceaseless and interminable, “day and night for ever and ever” (Rev 20:10; cf. 14:11).

Sixth, it is also termed “the second death” (Rev 20:14; 21:8; etc.).

Seventh, it has “no power” on the people of God (Rev 20:6; cf. 2:11).

In the sixth item above we have pointed out that the Lake of Fire is also denominated “The second death.” At least three reasons may be suggested for this. First, this designation intimates that the endless torments of the Lake of Fire are the penalty and wages of sin: “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:3).

Second, the use of this appellation²⁶ calls attention to the fact that all who are cast into the Lake of Fire will be eternally separated from God. As the first death is the separation of the soul from the body, so the second death will be the eternal separation of the soul from God, “Punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2Th 1:9).

Third, such a title emphasizes the dreadfulness of the Lake of Fire. To the normal man, death is the object he fears above all others. It is that from which he naturally shrinks. It is that which he most dreads. When, then, the Holy Spirit designates the Lake of Fire the “second death,” He is emphasizing the fact that it is an object of horror from which the sinner should flee!

²⁶ **appellation** – name or title.

F. The Eternality of the Sufferings of the Lost

Upon this point, the language of Scripture is most explicit. In Matthew 25:41 we read of “*everlasting* fire,” in Matthew 25:46 of “*everlasting* punishment,” in Mark 3:29 of “eternal damnation,” and in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 of “everlasting destruction.” We are aware that the enemies of God’s truth have sought to tamper with this word rendered “everlasting” and “eternal”; but their efforts have been entirely futile. The impossibility of rendering the Greek word by any other English equivalent appears from the following evidence.

1. 2 Corinthians 4:18

The Greek word is *aionios*, and its meaning and scope has been definitely defined for us by the Holy Spirit in at least two passages. “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are *eternal*” (2Co 4:18). Here a contrast is drawn between things “seen” and things “not seen,” between things “temporal” and things “eternal.” Now, it is obvious that if the things “temporal” should last forever, there would be no antithesis between them and the things “eternal.” It is equally obvious that if the things “eternal” are merely “age-long,” then they cannot be properly contrasted with things that are temporal. [The contrast between things temporal] and things eternal in this verse is as great as the difference between the things “seen” and the things “not seen.”

2. Philemon 15

The second example, which is of the same character as the one furnished in 2 Corinthians 4:18, is equally conclusive. In Philemon 15 we read, “For perhaps he therefore departed *for a season*, that thou shouldest receive him *for ever*.” Here the Greek “forever” is *aionios*. The apostle is beseeching Philemon to receive Onesimus, who had left his master, and whom Paul had sent back to him. When the apostle says “receive him for ever,” his evident meaning is, *never* banish him, *never* sell him, *never* again send him away. *Aionios* is here contrasted with “for a season,” showing that it means just the opposite of what that expression signifies.

“Eternal” or “everlasting” is the one and unvaried meaning of *aionios* in the New Testament. The same word translated “*everlasting* destruction,” “*everlasting* punishment,” and “*everlasting* fire” is rendered “*everlasting* life” in John 3:16, “the *everlasting* God” in Romans 16:26, “*eternal* salvation” in Hebrews 5:9, and “His *eternal* glory” in 1 Peter 5:10. No argument needs to be made to prove that in these passages it is impossible to fairly substitute any other alternative for “everlasting” and “eternal.” And it is thus with the other class of passages. The “everlasting fire” will synchronize with the existence of “the everlasting God.” The “everlasting punishment” of the lost will continue as long as the “everlasting life” of believers. The “eternal damnation” of wicked will no more have an end than will the “eternal salvation” of the redeemed. The “everlasting destruction” of unbelievers will prove as interminable as the “everlasting glory” of God. To

deny the former is to deny the latter. To affirm the everlastingness of God is to prove the endlessness of the misery of His enemies!

G. The Finality of Their State

The doom of those who shall be cast into the Lake of Fire is irrevocable and final. Many independent considerations prove this. Forgiveness of sins is limited to life on this earth. Once the sinner passes out of this world there remaineth “no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb 10:26). The fact that at death the soul of the wicked goes at once into the “furnace of fire” (Mat 13:42) witnesses to the fixity of his future state. The fact that, later, his resurrection is one “of damnation” (Joh 5:29) excludes all possibility of a last-hour reprieve. The fact that he is cast soul and body into a lake of fire argues that then he receives his final portion. The fact that the Lake of Fire is denominated the “second death” (Rev 21:8) denotes the hopelessness of his situation. Just as the first death cuts him off forever from this world, so the second death cuts him off forever from God.

In Philippians 3 the apostle Paul speaks of the enemies of the cross of Christ, and moved by the Holy Spirit he tells us that their “*end* is destruction” (v. 19). Stronger and more unequivocal language could not be used. There is nothing beyond the “end.” And the end of the enemies of the cross of Christ is “destruction,” not salvation. The Greek word here translated “end” is *telos*. It is found in the following passages: “Of his kingdom there shall be *no end*” (Luk 1:33); “Christ is the *end* of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom 10:4); “Having neither beginning of days nor *end* of life” (Heb 7:3); “I am...the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Rev 22:13).

As we have already seen, the twentieth chapter of Revelation describes the final judgment of the wicked before the Great White Throne, after which they are cast into the Lake of Fire. The chapters which follow—the last two in the Bible—may be read carefully and searched diligently, but they will not be found to contain so much as a single hint that those cast into the Lake of Fire shall ever be delivered from it. Instead, we find in the very last chapter of God’s Word the solemn statement, “He that is unjust, *let him be unjust still*: and he which is filthy, *let him be filthy still*” (Rev 22:11). Thus, the finality of their condition is expressly affirmed on the closing page of Holy Writ.

IV. The Nature of Punishment Awaiting the Lost

In the last two [chapters] we have considered some of the principal sophistries that unbelief has brought against the truth of eternal punishment, and have also examined the teaching of Scripture concerning the destiny of the wicked. We approach now the most solemn aspect of our subject, namely, the nature of the punishment awaiting the lost.

A. The Portion of the Wicked Immediately after Death

We turn first to the teaching of our Lord found in Luke 16. Here, we learn the following facts: first, that in Hades the lost are in full possession of all their faculties and sensibilities. They *see*, for the rich man saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom (v. 23). They *feel*, for he was in “torments” (v. 24). They *cry for mercy*, for he asked—but in vain—for a drop of water to cool his tongue (v. 24). They are in possession of *memory*, for the rich man was bidden to “remember” what he had received during his lifetime on earth (v. 25). It is impossible for them to join the redeemed: there is “a great gulf fixed” between them (v. 26).

Unspeakably solemn is all this. Not only will the lost be tormented in flames, but their anguish will be immeasurably increased by a sight of the redeemed being “comforted.” Then shall they *see* the happy portion of the blest which they despised, preferring as they did the pleasures of sin for a season. And how the retention of memory will further augment their sufferings! With what unfathomable sorrows will they recall the opportunities wasted, the expostulations²⁷ of parents and friends slighted, the warnings of God’s servants disregarded, the proclamations of God’s gospel spurned. And then to know there is no way of escape, no means of relief, no hope of a reprieve! Their lot will be unbearable; their awful portion beyond endurance. The Son of God has faithfully forewarned that “there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Mat 13:42). It is very significant that Christ referred to this just *seven* times: denoting the *completeness* of their misery and anguish. (See Mat 8:12; 13:42-50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luk 13:28.)

B. The Final Portion of the Wicked

1. “From the presence of the Lord”

The final portion of the wicked is spoken of as being “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2Th 1:9). None but one who really knows God can begin to estimate what it will mean to be eternally banished from the Lord. Forever separated from the Fount of all goodness, *never* to enjoy the light of God’s countenance, *never* to bask in the sunshine of His presence—this, this is the most awful of all! 2 Thesalonians 1:9 furnishes clear intimation that the judgment of Matthew 25, with its eternal sentence, looks beyond the Assize.²⁸ “Destruction from the presence of the Lord” is parallel with “depart from me ye cursed.”

2. “Everlasting punishment”

The final portion of the wicked is spoken of as “everlasting punishment” (Mat 25:46). In 1 John 4:18 the same Greek word is rendered “torment.” This term announces the satisfying of God’s justice. In the punishing of the wicked, God vindicates His outraged majesty. Herein, “punishment” differs from correction or discipline. Punishment is not

²⁷ **expostulations** – earnest reasonings with someone against something he intends to do or has done; earnest protests.

²⁸ **Assize** – *here*: Last Judgment. Assizes were periodic court sessions formerly held in each of the counties of England and Wales for the trial of civil or criminal cases.

designed for the good of the one who suffers it. It is intended for the enforcing of law and order; it is necessary for the preservation of government.

3. “Tormenting”

The final portion of the wicked is spoken of as a “tormenting.” This is proven by the fact that the everlasting fire into which the wicked depart is “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat 25:41)—which emphasizes the awfulness of this punishment, rather than specifies who are going to endure. This verse sets forth the *severity* of the punishment of the lost. If the everlasting fire be “prepared for the devil and his angels,” then how intolerable it will be! If the place of eternal torment into which all unbelievers shall be cast is the same as that in which God’s archenemy will suffer, how dreadful that place must be.

That this everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, produces the most awful suffering is clear from Revelation 20:10, where we are told that Satan shall be “tormented day and night for ever and ever.” No doubt this torment will be both internal and external, mental and physical. The word occurs for the first time in the New Testament in Matthew 8:6. “Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, *grievously tormented*.” The same word occurs again in Revelation 9:5, where we read of infernal locusts issuing from the pit, which are given power to torment men—the nature of which is explained as “the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.” So intense will be the suffering caused therefrom, men shall “seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them” (Rev 9:6). This torment then cannot mean less than the most excruciating pain that we are now capable of conceiving. How much the pains of hell will exceed the pains of earth we know not!

4. “Eternal fire”

The final portion of the wicked is spoken of as “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7). But many say this is merely a figurative expression. We ask: How do they know that? Where has God told them so in His Word? Personally, we believe that when God says “fire,” He means “fire.” We refuse to blunt the sharp edge of His Word (Heb 4:12). Was the Deluge²⁹ figurative? Was it figurative “brimstone and fire” that descended from heaven and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24)? Were the plagues upon Egypt figurative ones (Exo 9ff)? Is it figurative fire that shall yet burn this earth, and cause the very elements to “melt with fervent heat” (2Pe 3:10)? No; in each of these cases we are obliged to take the words of Scripture in their literal signification. Let those who dare affirm that hell-fire is non-literal answer to God. We are not their judges; but we refuse to accept their toning down of these solemn words.

Literal fire in hell presents no difficulty at all to the writer. The lost will have literal bodies when they are cast into hell. The angels also have bodies; and for all we know to the contrary, the devil has too. But the question is often asked, “How can the bodies of the lost be tormented eternally by literal fire? Would not the fire utterly consume them?” Even though we were unable to furnish an answer to this question, we should

²⁹ **Deluge** – Noah’s Flood (Gen 6:17ff).

still believe that Scripture meant what it said. But we are satisfied that God's Word answers this question. In Exodus we read of the bush in the wilderness burning with fire, and yet was not consumed (Exo 3:2)! In Daniel 3 we read of the three Hebrews being cast into the fiery furnace of Babylon, yet were they not consumed! Why was this? Because in some way, unknown to us, *God preserved* the bush, and the bodies of the three Hebrews. Is God, then, *unable* to preserve the bodies of the damned from being consumed? Surely not. But we are not left even to this unescapable inference. In Mark 9:47-49 we are told, "It is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. For every one shall be *salted with fire.*" The expression "salted with fire" confirms what we have said above. Salt is a *preservative*; hence, when we are told that "every one" who is cast into Gehenna shall be "salted with fire," we learn that the very fire itself—so far from consuming—shall *preserve*. If it be asked, "How can this be?" We answer, Because that fire is "prepared" by God (Mat 25:41)!

5. *Association with the vilest of the vile*

The final portion of the wicked is described as an association with the vilest of the vile. "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Rev 21:8). O dear reader, weigh³⁰ well this solemn language. You may be a person of culture and refinement; judged by moral standards your life may be exemplary and spotless; you may pride yourself on your honesty and truthfulness; you may be very particular in your choice of friends and very careful to avoid the company of the profane and vicious; you may even be religious, and look down in scorn and pity upon the idolaters of heathendom—but God says that if you die in unbelief, your portion shall be with "the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars." Think of what it will mean to spend eternity in the Prison-house of the universe with Cain, Pharaoh, and Judas! Think of what it will mean to be shut up with the vile Sodomites? Think of being incarcerated forever with every blasphemer who has ever lived!

6. *"The blackness of darkness forever"*

The final portion of the wicked is described as "the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 13). Unrelieved will be their fearful sufferings and interminable their torments. No means of escape; no possibility of a reprieve; no hope of deliverance. Not one will be found who is able to befriend them and intercede with God for them. They had the offer of a mediator often made them in this world; but no such offer will be made them in the Lake of Fire. "There is *no peace*, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa 57:21). There will be no resting-place in hell; no secret corner where they can find a little respite; no cooling fountain at which they may refresh themselves. There will be no change or variation of their lot. Day and night, forever and ever, shall they be punished. With no prospect of any improvement, they will sink down into blank despair.

³⁰ **weigh** – consider the importance.

7. *Beyond power to resist*

The final portion of the wicked will be *beyond the creature's power of resistance*. "And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, *it will grind him to powder*" (Mat 21:44). There are many who now say, "If at the end I find myself in hell, I will bear it as well as I can"—as if by strength of will and firmness of mind they shall, in measure at least, be able to support themselves. But alas! Their resolutions will count for nothing.

It is common with men in this world to shun calamities, but if they find this is impossible, they set themselves to bear it: they fortify their spirits and resolve to support themselves under it as well as they can. They muster up all their courage and resolution in the determination to keep their hearts from sinking. But it will be utterly vain for sinners to do this in the Lake of Fire. What would it help a worm that was about to be crushed by some great rock, to collect its strength and endeavor to set itself to bear up against its weight, and so seek to prevent itself from being crushed? Much less will a poor damned soul be able to support itself under the weight of the wrath of Almighty God. No matter how much the sinner may now harden himself in order to endure the pains of hell, the first moment he shall feel the flames, his heart will melt like wax before the furnace. "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it" (Eze 22:14).

If such then be the case with impenitent sinners, that they can neither escape their punishment, nor deliver themselves from it, nor bear up under it, what will become of them? I answer in the words of another.

"They will wholly sink down into eternal death. There will be that sinking of heart of which we now cannot conceive. We see how it is with the body when in extreme pain. The nature of the body will support itself for a considerable time under very great pain, so as to keep from wholly sinking. There will be great struggles, lamentable groans and panting, and it may be convulsions. These are the strugglings of nature to support itself under the extremity of the pain. There is, as it were, a great lothness in nature to yield to it; it cannot bear wholly to sink. But yet sometimes pain of body is so very extreme and exquisite, that the nature of the body cannot support itself under it; however loth it may be to sink, yet it cannot bear the pain; there are a few struggles, throes, and pantings, and it may be a shriek or two, and the nature yields to the violence of the torments, sinks down, and the body dies. This is the death of the body. *So it will be with the soul in hell*; it will have no strength or power to deliver itself; and its torment and horror will be so great, so mighty, so vastly disproportioned to its strength, that having no strength in the least to support itself—although it be infinitely contrary to the nature and inclination of the soul utterly to sink—yet it will sink. It will utterly and totally sink, without the least degree of remaining comfort, strength, courage, or hope. And though it will never be annihilated, its being and perception will never be abolished—yet, such will be the infinite depth of gloominess that it will sink into, that it will be in a state of death, eternal death.

“The nature of man desires happiness; it is the nature of the soul to crave and thirst after well-being. And if it be under misery, it equally pants after relief; the greater the misery is, the more easily doth it struggle for help. But if all relief be withholden, all strength overborne, all support utterly gone; then it sinks into the darkness of death. We can conceive but little of the matter; we cannot conceive what the sinking of the soul in such a case is. But to help your conception, imagine yourself to be cast into a fiery oven, all of a glowing heat; or into the midst of a blowing brick-kiln; or of a great furnace, where your pain would be as much greater than that occasioned by accidentally touching a coal of fire, as the heat is greater. Imagine also that your body were to lie there for a quarter of an hour, full of fire, as full within and without as a bright coal of fire, all the while full of quick sense—what horror would you feel at the entrance of such a furnace! And how long would that quarter of an hour seem to you! If it were to be measured by a glass, how long would the glass seem to be running! And after you had endured it for one minute, how overbearing would it be to you to think that you had yet to endure the other fourteen.

“But what would be the effect on your soul, if you knew you must lie there enduring that torment to the full for twenty-four hours! And how much greater would be the effect, if you knew you must endure it for a whole year; and how vastly greater still, if you knew you must endure it for a thousand years! O then, how would your heart sink, if you thought, if you knew, that you must bear it forever and ever! That there would be no end! That after millions of millions of ages, your torment would be no nearer to an end, than ever it was; and that you never, never should be delivered! But your torment in hell will be *immeasurably greater* than this illustration represents! How then will the heart of a poor creature sink under it! How utterly inexpressible and inconceivable must the sinking of the soul be in such a case” (Jonathan Edwards³¹).

Such, in brief, is the portion awaiting the lost: eternal separation from the Fount of all goodness; everlasting punishment; torment of soul and body; endless existence in the Lake of Fire, in association with the vilest of the vile; every ray of hope excluded; utterly crushed and overwhelmed by the wrath of a sin-avenging God. And let us remember in *Whose* Word these solemn statements are found! They are found in the Word of Him Who is *faithful*, and therefore has He written in plain and positive language so that none need be deceived. They are found in the Word of Him Who *cannot lie*, and therefore He has not employed the language of exaggeration. They are found in the Word of Him Who says what He means and means what He says, and therefore the writer, for one, dares do nothing else than receive them at their face value. We turn now to the application of the subject.

³¹ **Jonathan Edwards** (1703-1758) – American Congregational preacher. Regarded as America’s greatest evangelical theologian and well-known for his preaching in the Great Awakening along with George Whitefield. Author of *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, and numerous other titles. Born in East Windsor, Connecticut Colony. Edwards titles are available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

V. Applications

A. God Vindicated

In what has been before us, we learn how *the character and throne of God will be vindicated*. What can be too severe a judgment upon those who have despised so great a Being as the Almighty? If he that is guilty of treason against an earthly government deserves to lose his life, what punishment can be great enough for one who has preferred his own pleasure before the will and glory of a God Who is infinitely good? To despise infinite excellence merits infinite misery. God has commanded the sinner to repent; He has courted him with overtures of grace; He has bountifully supplied his every need; and He has presented before him the Son of His love, His choicest treasure—and yet men persist in their wicked course! No possible ground, then, will the sinner have to appeal against the sentence of the Judge of all the earth, seeing that He not only tendered mercy toward him, but also bore with him in so much patience when He might justly have smitten him down upon the first crime he ever committed and removed him to hell upon the first refusal of His proffered grace.

That God shall punish every rebel against Himself is required by the very perfections of His high sovereignty. It is but meet³² that He should display His governmental supremacy. The creature has dared to assert its independency, the subject has risen up in arms against his King; therefore, the right of God's throne must be vindicated—"I know that the Lord is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them" (Exo 18:11). When Pharaoh dared to pit himself against Jehovah, God manifested His authority by destroying him at the Red Sea. Another king He turned into a beast, to make him know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men (Dan 4:25). So, when the history of this world is wound up, God will make a full and final manifestation of His sovereign majesty. Though He now *endures* (not "loves") with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; it is that in the coming Day He may "shew his wrath" and "make his power known" (Rom 9:22).

B. Mankind's Folly Exposed

What has been before us serves to *expose the folly and madness of the greater part of mankind*, in that for the sake of present momentary gratification, they run the serious risk of enduring all these eternal torments. They prefer a small pleasure, or a little wealth, or a little earthly honor and fame (which lasts but "for a season") to an escape from the Lake of Fire. If it be true that the torments of hell are everlasting, what will it profit a man if he "gain the whole world, and lose his own soul" (Mat 16:26)? How mad men are who hear and read of these things and pretend to believe them, who are alive but a little while, a few short years at most—and yet who are careless about what becomes of themselves in the next world, where there is neither change nor end! How mad are they who hear that if they go on in sin, they shall be eternally miserable; and yet are

³² **meet** – fitting; suitable.

not moved, but hear it with as much indifference as if they were not concerned in the matter at all! And yet for all they know to the contrary, they may be in fiery torments before another week is at an end!

How sad to note that this unconcern is shared by the great majority of our fellows. Age makes little difference. The young are occupied with pleasures, the middle-aged with worldly advancement, the aged with their attainments or lack of them. With the first it is the lust of the flesh, with the second it is the lust of the eyes, with the third it is the pride of life (1Jo 2:16)—which banishes from their minds all serious thoughts of the life to come. “The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and *madness* is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead” (Ecc 9:3). O the blinding power of sin! O the deceitfulness of riches! O the perversity of the human heart! Nothing so reveals these things as the incredible sight of men and women enjoying themselves and being at rest, while they are suspended over the eternal burning by the frail thread of mortality, which may be snapped at any moment!

C. The Unsaved to Tremble

What has been before us ought to make *every unsaved reader to tremble* as he scans these pages. These things are no mere abstractions, but dread realities, as countless thousands have already discovered to their bitter cost. They may not seem real to you now, but in a short time at most—should you continue to reject the Christ of God—they will be *your* portion. You, too, shall lift up your eyes in hell and behold the saints in heaven. You, too, shall crave a drop of water to alleviate your fearful agony; but it will be in vain. You, too, shall cry for mercy; but then it will be too late.

O unsaved reader, we pray you not to throw this aside and seek to dismiss the subject from your thoughts. That is how thousands before you have acted, and the very memory of their folly only accentuates their misery. Far better had you been made wretched now for a time, than that you should weep and wail and gnash your teeth forever. Far better that you have your present false peace broken, than that you should be a stranger to real peace for all eternity.

“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luk 13:3). Whoever you are, whether young or old, whether rich or poor, whether religious or irreligious, if you are in a Christless state, then this is what awaits you at the end of your present course. This, this is the hell over which *you* now hang, and into which you are ready to drop this very moment. It is vain for you to flatter yourself with hopes that you shall avoid it, or to say in your heart, “Perhaps it may not be; perhaps things have been represented worse than they really are.” These things are according to the Word of Truth, and if you will not be convinced by that Word when presented to you by men in the name of God, then God Himself will yet undertake to prove to you that these things *are so*.

Think it not strange that God should deal so severely with you, or that the wrath you shall suffer shall be so great. For great as it is, it is no greater than the mercy that you now despise. The love of God, His marvelous grace in sending His own Son to die for sinners, is every whit as great and wonderful as this inexpressible wrath. You have re-

fused to accept Christ as the Saviour from the wrath to come, you have despised God's dying love; why then should you not suffer wrath as great as that grace and love that you have rejected? Does it still seem incredible that God should so harden His heart against a poor sinner as to bear down upon him with infinite power and merciless wrath? Then pause and ask: Is it any greater than it is for me to harden my heart against Him, against infinite mercy, against the Son of His love? O dear friends, face this question of Christ Himself, "How can ye escape the damnation of hell" (Mat 23:33). There is only one way of escape, and that is to *flee to the Saviour*. If you would not fall into the hands of the living God, then cast yourself into the arms of the Christ Who died—"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" (Psa 2:12).

D. The Professing Christian to Examine Himself

What has been before us ought to make *every professing Christian diligently examine himself*. Weigh carefully the tremendously solemn issues that turn on whether or not you have *really* passed from death unto life. You cannot afford to be uncertain. There is far too much at stake. Remember that you are prejudiced in your own favor. Remember that you have a treacherous heart. Remember that the devil is the great deceiver of souls. Remember that "there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Pro 14:12). Remember it is written that "many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" And then He will answer them, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mat 7:22-23).

There are many who now wear the guise of saints, who appear like saints; and their state, both in their own eyes and that of their neighbors, is satisfactory. And yet they have on only sheep's clothing; at heart, they are wolves! But no disguise can deceive the Judge of all. *His* eyes are as a flame of fire: they search the hearts and try the reins of the children of men (Rev 1:14; Jer 17:10).

Wherefore, let each take earnest heed that he be not deceived. Compare yourself with the Word of God, for that is the rule by which you will be tried. Test your works, for it is by those you will be made manifest. Inquire whether you are really living a Christian life; whether or not the fear of God is upon you; whether or not you are mortifying your members that are upon the earth; whether or not you are "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts"; and whether you are living "soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world"—for it is thus that grace teaches the saints to live (Ti 2:11-12). Cry unto God earnestly and frequently that He will reveal you to yourself, and discover to you whether you are building upon the Rock or upon the sand (Mat 7:24-27). Make the Psalmist's prayer yours—"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa 139:23-24). God will search you hereafter; and make fully manifest what you are, both to yourself and to others. Let each of us, then, humbly request Him to search us now. We have urgent need of divine help in this matter, for our heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9).

E. The Faithful to Praise

What has been before us should cause *those who really enjoy the full assurance of faith to praise God with a loud voice*. To each of you we say: God has given you wonderful cause for gratitude and thanksgiving. You, too, justly deserved to suffer the full weight of the wrath of a sin-hating and sin-avenging God. It is not long since *you* loved darkness rather than light (Joh 3:19). It is only a short time since *you* turned a deaf ear to both God's commands and entreaties. It is only a few years at most since *you* despised and rejected His beloved Son. What marvelous grace was it, then, that snatched *you* as a brand from the burning! What wondrous love was it that delivered you from the wrath to come! What matchless mercy it was that changed you from a child of hell (Mat 23:15) to a child of God! O how you should praise the Father for having ever set His love upon you. How you should praise the Son for having died to save you from the Lake of Fire. How you should praise the blessed Spirit for having quickened you into newness of life. And how your appreciation ought to be expressed now in a life that is glorifying to the triune God. How diligently ought you to seek to learn what is wellpleasing in His sight. How earnestly you should seek His will. How quick should you be to run in the way of His commandments. Let your life correspond with the praises of your lips.

F. The Faithful to Serve

What has been before us *ought to stir up all of God's people to a deepened sense of their duty*. Fellow Christian, have you no obligations toward your godless neighbors? If God has made clear these solemn truths to you, does it not deepen your responsibility toward the unsaved? If you have no love for souls, it is greatly to be feared that your own soul is in imminent danger! If you can witness, unmoved, men and women hurrying down the broad road that leadeth to destruction (Mat 7:13), then it is seriously to be doubted if you have within you the Spirit of that One Who wept over Jerusalem (Mat 23:37). It is true you have no power of your own to save a soul from death, but are you faithfully giving out that Word which is the instrument that God uses to bring souls from death unto life? Are you supplicating God as you ought and *depending* on Him to bless your efforts to point the lost to the Lamb of God? Are you as fervent as you should be in your cries to God on behalf of the lost? Alas, must you not join the writer as he hangs his head in shame? Is there not reason for each of us to ask God to give us a clearer vision of that indescribably awful portion which awaits every Christ rejector, and to enable us to act in the power of such a vision!

G. Future Praise

What has been before us *will yet be the occasion of profoundest praise to God*. Whatever difficulties the eternal punishment of the wicked may present to us now—and it is freely granted that it *is* difficult for our reason to grasp it, and that of necessity, for we are incapable of discerning the infinite malignity of sin, and therefore unable to see what punishment it really deserves—yet, in the Day to come it will be far otherwise. When we behold God's righteous dealings with His enemies, when we hear the sentences being given according to their work, when we see how justly and thoroughly they deserve mer-

ciless wrath, and stand by as they are cast into the Lake of Fire—so far from shrinking back in horror, our hearts will give vent to gladsome praise. Just as of old the overthrow of God’s enemies at the Red Sea caused His people to burst forth in worshipful song, so in the coming Day we shall be moved to rejoicing when we witness the final display of God’s holiness and justice in the overthrow and punishment of all who have defied Him. Remember that in the destruction of the wicked God will be *glorified*, and this it is which will be the occasion of the rejoicing of His people. Not only will God be “clear” when He judges (Psa 51:4), but His perfections will be magnified in the sentences pronounced.

