

EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT

AN APPEAL DIRECT TO THE WORD

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PREFACE

The present day is called the Day of Enlightenment, and it is indeed a time of great and increasing knowledge on many subjects, the Holy Scriptures included. That this should be so is not to be wondered at, for the Prophet was caused by the Holy Spirit to predict the circumstances which surround the present generation (Daniel 12: 4,9-10).

But, notwithstanding the great increase of knowledge, there is still much misunderstanding of very important subjects, 'Everlasting Punishment' being one of them. Largely on account of misunderstanding this subject, the loving character of the Heavenly Father is often grievously misrepresented by those who would not for a moment willingly do so. The same misunderstanding causes Christians to be perplexed and placed at a disadvantage, while infidels grow bolder and more scornful, and sceptics become confirmed scoffers.

Let it be clearly seen from the Scriptures that 'Everlasting Punishment', mentioned in the Bible as the penalty for wilful sin under enlightenment, is not that 'eternal torment' which has filled the minds of so many Christians, and a new song will be put into their mouths, even the loving kindness of our God, while the seat of the scornful will be overturned.

Should these pages be permitted, under divine blessing, to bear some small part in making clear the truth on this important subject, and so of increasing love and reverence for God, their object will be attained. With prayers that it may be so, this 'Appeal direct to the Word' is sent forth.

Melbourne, January, 1911. E. C. and R. B. HENNINGES.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

In the four years since the first edition of this 'Appeal direct to the Word' was issued over fifteen thousand copies have been circulated. This has been done largely by recommendation from one to another. Many have written to express their thankfulness to God for having through this means been delivered from the God-dishonouring tradition of eternal torment, for they have been led to see that the Bible does not teach it. So long as they thought it was in the Bible, they felt compelled to believe it, and feared to do wrong by opposing it. But now they are anxious to help others to the same enlightenment.

The first edition has been revised, and new matter has been added. We trust that enough has been said on each point to enable the reader to find additional corroborative Scripture references, and by the aid of the Holy Spirit to divide the Word of truth rightly - distinguishing between prophecy and fulfilment, history and doctrine, plain statement and allegory or parable, and placing each in its proper age and dispensation.

That the second edition may be used of the Lord to even a greater extent than was the first, is the hope and prayer of

THE AUTHORS. Melbourne, July 1, 1915.

Punishment for Sin Essential

That sin and crime deserve punishment is a truism recognised in all forms of government among men, from the lowest to the highest. There may be differences of opinion as to what constitutes a misdemeanour or a crime, and as to the nature and severity of the punishment to be inflicted, but it is agreed that the necessity for the protection of life and property lays upon all in authority the obligation of punishing offences against society, whether the social arrangements be primitive or complex. In extreme cases in uncivilised lands, the infliction of the death penalty is often accompanied or preceded by cruel tortures, but in civilised lands it is regarded as sufficient to rid society of undesirable characters in as painless a manner, and with as little admixture of vindictiveness, as possible.

All students of Scripture recognise that true wisdom among men comes from God. He it was who first pronounced the death penalty for infraction of His command (Genesis 2:17; 3:19,22-24), and who has enforced its execution upon our race for thousands of years (Romans 5:12). He it is who announces that His determination is to have ultimately a clean universe by the destruction of the wilfully wicked; and not only so, but that every secret thought and pernicious word and act shall be brought into judgment. And He it was who prepared for the children of Israel under Moses a code embodying the inflexible *"life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth"* (Deuteronomy 19:21; see also Matthew 5:38), the justice of which is recognised by all to this day.

The difficulties of the student in connection with this subject are many. On the one hand he admits that God has the right to require obedience of all His creatures, and that disobedience deserves punishment; but on the other hand his whole nature revolts against the popular teaching that the God of love and mercy and goodness has prepared a place in which the vast majority of our race are to be subjected to unspeakable torture throughout an infinite eternity, without one moment's mitigation of the severity of their pains. The pity of it is that, while the Scriptures contain not one word of support for such a theory, the Bible is made the peg upon which to hang the awful teaching; and everyone who dares so much as to question the theory is intimidated by threats of finding himself in the midst of that torment when his life on earth is ended. Would that the truth could be known, that God's holy character might be cleared of this unwarranted aspersion, and that His glorious purpose of love and mercy might be fully realised and rejoiced in by all His people!

Three Alternatives are Open

to the one who questions the prevailing teaching, that eternal torment awaits all the unsaved. The first, which is being adopted by many, is to reject the Bible altogether, because it is supposed to teach a doctrine to their minds more monstrous than they would care to attribute to a fiend. The second, which other large numbers have adopted, is to assert that as the Bible teaches it, they must believe it, and therefore they refuse to discuss the matter, or even to consider the evidence that the Bible itself can be explained and understood more satisfactorily without that doctrine. The third, and by far the best method, is to search the Scriptures themselves, to compare Scripture with Scripture, and to discover, if possible, just what the Bible does say on Life, Death, Punishment, and related subjects.

The first alternative involves too hasty a disposal of the whole question, while the second is the method of the ostrich, which hides its head rather than face the situation. The third is the only course worthy of a sincere inquirer after the truth, who is willing that God be proved true though thereby every human theory be shown to be false. God's character cannot be worse than that of the most kind-hearted and just of His children; the authority of His Word cannot be injured by candid investigation of its parables, symbols and prophecies, as well as its threats and promises, and its moral teaching; God's purposes cannot be altered by attaching to His Word meanings He never intended, and widely circulating the same. Nor will indolence or fear be sufficient excuse for failure (on the part of His children with Bibles in their hands) to learn and to proclaim the truth on so important a subject. No task can be fraught with more blessing than prayerful, patient study of that Word, which is *"able to make thee wise unto salvation"* (2 Timothy 3:15), and which is sufficient that the man of God be thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Part of the blessing that comes from patient study is the realisation that the teaching of eternal torment is not to be found in the Bible. The Parable of the Rich man and Lazarus is commonly supposed to teach everlasting misery for the unsaved, but we believe that candid consideration of all non-parabolic and non-symbolic statements concerning future punishment will assist to an understanding of it and of all other passages of a parabolic or figurative character.

Because the parable begins, *"There was a certain rich man"* and *"there was a certain beggar"* (Luke 16:19-20), it is considered by some to mean that two such men really existed, and that the account in Luke 16 describes their actual experience after death. But such a view overlooks the fact that it was our Lord's custom to relate His parables as though they were accounts of actual occurrences; *"a certain rich man* (Luke 16:1)", *"a certain beggar"* (Luke 16:20), *"a certain priest"*

(Luke 10:31), "*a certain Samaritan*" (Luke 10:33) and so on. The same method is pursued in fables, which are written as though the conversations between the animals involved had actually taken place; whereas everyone knows that both the action and the conversation of the tale are a device to point a moral.

This is not said in order to put our Lord's parables on a par with fables, but merely to indicate that a parable is a story told to illustrate a spiritual truth, and that the more circumstantial the story the more impressive the truth.

The Gospel is Good Tidings

To any who have read thus far, and who still feel timid about investigating the subject of Future Punishment, we would say, "*Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*" (Luke 2:10). Do not let anyone persuade you that your craving for good tidings of God's mercy and love towards His creatures is an evil craving to be put away; but rather thank God that your mind is already sufficiently enlightened and your heart sufficiently enlarged to enable you to apprehend that much of God's true character; and thank God that you have sufficient confidence in Him to believe that He will reveal to you His loving purposes if you go about learning them in the right way. And pray, also, that His Holy Spirit may fill your heart to overflowing with the same beneficent love toward the weak and erring that He has shown towards you, so that you may never again misrepresent Him or frighten them with the false theories of the dark ages.

How did the teaching of eternal torment originate? Largely through the introduction of Grecian philosophies into Christianity in the early centuries of our age. Symbols and Parables, instead of being interpreted by such Biblical methods as would bring out the Truth, were taken literally in order to support the pagan mythology incorporated by apostate bishops and priests. For illustration of Old and New Testament use of symbols compare Jeremiah 11:4 with Matthew 3:12; 13:42, and see the explanation in Bible Talks for Heart and Mind.

To disbelieve the tradition of men concerning the eternal torment of the vast majority of our race does not necessarily involve one in Universalism, or Unitarianism, or other unscriptural philosophies; nor does it require one to assert that an unbeliever may live as indulgently as he please, and still enter heaven on equal footing with the believer. To discard this error, attached by men to the Gospel, is rather to reveal the Gospel in its original form of "*good tidings*", and to enable one to study with unbiased mind the Lord's own explanations as to what "*good tidings*" means. Such passages as denote grades of punishment according to the degree of light sinned against can be given due weight (Matthew 11:22,24; 12:31-32; Hebrews 2:3), as well as those which declare the extreme penalty for wilful sin after full knowledge (Hebrews 6:4-8; 1 John 5:16; Revelation 21:8).

The Gospel is thus found to be good tidings of a Saviour Whose mission is to deliver His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:11), not to encourage or excuse them in sin. In order that they may receive this deliverance, and the eternal life which He has in His power to bestow, it is necessary for them to believe on Him, and to obey Him in whatsoever He shall say unto them (Acts 3:19-23; Hebrews 5:8-9). There is *"none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

The Gospel furthermore declares that His Kingdom is to be established under the whole heaven (Daniel 2:44; 7:27), that the eternal destiny of each individual member of our race is not a matter of chance but of the Lord's deep concern, that having all power in heaven and on earth He will see to it that each member of the race for which He died shall have the fullest opportunity for coming to the knowledge of the truth, either in this life or in the next (1 Timothy 2:4-7), that certain limited punishments are inflicted for correction, and that the extreme penalty, symbolised by *"the lake of fire"* (Revelation 21:1-8), is pronounced only against the perversely rebellious and disobedient.

The Effect of the Truth

It is thought by some that to publish abroad the fact that the Bible does not teach eternal torment will encourage sinners to greater excesses, and deprive Christians of a necessary stimulus to faithfulness. In regard to the latter, it may be said that love to God, gratitude for the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, and anticipation of the joys of the Kingdom, are the acceptable motives for service, not fear of punishment. As to unbelievers, for many centuries the effort has been made to frighten them into a profession of one form or another of Christianity, by threats of future woe, with very poor results. The notion that God purposes to torment His creatures, far from having a deterrent effect upon the evil natures of men, has had the very reverse, inclining some to practise now upon their fellow-men the cruelties which they are told await them after death; while others cultivate the disposition of vindictiveness, and still others say that if such a fate awaits them they will enjoy to the utmost the pleasures of the present.

Our Lord prayed that His disciples might be sanctified by the truth. Such an error as eternal torment cannot sanctify the hearts and minds of kind-hearted, reasonable beings. If some of those who hold it are sanctified, it is by virtue of the truth held on other subjects, rather than by reason of the error held on this; for the more of the mind of Christ they receive through the study of the divine Word, the meditation upon His virtues, and the practice of holiness, the more will they be inclined to hope and believe that God's purposes will prove to be better than their fears. Many are ashamed of the teaching, and prefer not to refer to it. The right and the only satisfactory way is to see that it is not in the Scriptures, and openly to repudiate it, taking a firm stand for the Truth revealed by the Gospel of Christ, as the Apostle said;

"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. FOR THEREIN IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REVEALED ..." (Romans 1:16-17).

The righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel, is the Apostle's statement. And so it is. The Gospel discloses a just penalty for the sin committed in Eden; just penalties for individual transgressions arising out of that original transgression, and a just penalty for wilful sin against light and knowledge. The Gospel also provides a way by which God can be just, and yet the justifier of Him who believes in Jesus (Romans 5:12; Hebrews 2:2-3; Romans 3:26).