

# WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES TEACH?

---

## ABOUT THE PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED

---

A VERY GREAT RESPONSIBILITY attaches to those who seek to be expounders of GOD'S Truth. Fairness, courtesy and honesty on both sides of any controversy would in the majority of instances result in mutual respect the one for the other, and a ready willingness to relinquish error by the one whose views are proved to be out of reasonable harmony with Scripture statement and incontrovertible fact. There should be mutual recognition that of two opposing views only one can be right.

That such a spirit of fairness is often lost sight of by some, is painfully obvious when those holding to and teaching the doctrine of the eternity of evil, and the eternal conscious suffering of the ungodly, persist in describing believers in conditional immortality, (that is, the truth that immortality is only to be had on conditions) as believers in "non-eternity of punishment"; and this in spite of disclaimers to the contrary that to them "*eternal destruction*" or "*death*" is an eternal punishment, involving an *eternal loss* of life, including all that pertains to life.

Were this misrepresentation of the views of fellow Christians the only regrettable feature of the controversy it might well be overlooked, but the issues are far deeper,

and result not merely in the questioning of the word of a brother in Christ — serious though that may be under given circumstances — but of *definite denial* of the Word of the Living GOD by placing an interpretation on passages of Scripture that is entirely at variance with the straightforward, natural, literal and obvious meaning of the language used.

It is said by those who claim to be “orthodox” and “evangelical” custodians of “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” — in contradistinction to those who differ from them — that “Scripture invariably conveys the thought of the punishment of sin being eternal conscious suffering.” (See *The Witness* published in Glasgow by J. R. Caldwell of the Brethren, and *The Gospel Witness* published by Rev. T. T. Shields, Baptist minister in Toronto.) The only sure method, and eminently fair on all such occasions, that can be brought to test the accuracy of so terrific a dogma, is to make our appeal direct to Scripture, and to judge by the meaning of the words contained in the passages quoted, which side most faithfully sets forth the actual teaching of the Scriptures on this momentous matter. If it is true that “Scripture invariably teaches that the punishment of sin is eternal conscious suffering”, how is the reader going to reconcile the following passages with such an idea? We maintain that they cannot be reconciled, and that any unbiased mind will acquiesce in that conclusion.

Reading from the Revised Version, we find the following: “Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and he shall not be. . . . The wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the

Lord shall be as the excellency of the pastures; they shall consume; like smoke shall they consume away." Psalm 37:10, 20.

"Ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water. And the strong shall be as tow, and his work as a spark; and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them." Isa. 1:30, 31.

"What do ye imagine against the Lord? He will make a full end; affliction shall not rise up the second time. For though they be like tangled thorns, and drenched as it were in their drink, they shall be devoured utterly as dry stubble." Nahum 1:9-10.

"Behold the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace; and all the proud and all that work wickedness, shall be as stubble; and the day that cometh shall *burn them up*, saith the Lord of Hosts, that *it shall leave them neither root nor branch*." Malachi 4:1.

"Even now is the axe laid at the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire . . . . He that cometh after me is mightier than I . . . . whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and will gather the wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire." Matthew 3:10-12.

"Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them . . . . As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the world." Matthew 13:30-40.

"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered: and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned." John 15:6.

“They are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is perdition.” Philippians 3:18, 19.

“But these as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things they understand not, and shall utterly perish in their own corruption.” 2 Peter 2:12.

In these passages (only samples of many more of similar import) we have several figures under which the punishment of the wicked is predicted. Is there in a single one of them the idea of “eternal conscious suffering”? Do they not all *expressly exclude* the thought? An article that consumes away into smoke — what is there left of it? “A garden without water” — what life is there in it? How does the Lord make a full end of those who have an endless existence? How can those who exist forever in conscious indestructible existence be appropriately likened unto tow or dry stubble or chaff — the most inflammable of all materials? Who would ever think that a tree would continue to exist and live of which it is said that “neither root nor branch” of it is left? Who would ever suppose that an unfruitful tree dug up and cast out and put in the fire; or a withered branch severed from the life-giving stem and cast into the fire; or tares gathered up in bundles to be burned are symbols of continued life and existence? Who believes that an unquenchable fire — one that *cannot be put out* — will not automatically cease to be when all the material which it consumes is finally destroyed? Who believes that there is no difference between coming to an end and having no end? No one would say or believe any of these *impossible* things except a man who is turned aside from the truth by believing in the false doctrine of nat-

ural immortality.

So completely have our friends (for they are still our friends along other lines of endeavor) failed to consider the plain and logical import of the passages which we have quoted, we might almost wonder if these have not, with scores of other similar passages, been deleted from the Bibles which they possess; and having cast away the anchor of solid fact and "sound speech which cannot be gainsaid," are obliged to pin their faith to doubtful interpretations of a few parabolic and highly figurative passages of Scripture, which when rightly understood *unquestionably support* the passages we have quoted, and in doing so, as definitely deny the theory we are combating. For what is the plain unfigurative language of Scripture? "The wages of SIN is DEATH;" "the *end* of these things is DEATH;" "who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord", and so on *ad infinitum*.

Again we ask — Who supposes that death means life; that to die means to live forever even in misery? Who supposes that corruption means conscious existence; that everlasting destruction means everlasting preservation (in misery); or that the finish of sin means that it shall go on without end? Again we reply — No one but those who have a false and hopeless theory to support, cost what it may; for the scene of the rich man and Lazarus is laid in Hades, a place of the dead, where the Scriptures inform us there is no knowledge, nor work, nor praise, but that the worm and corruption are there. The worm that dieth not, is quoted from Isaiah 66, as also the unquenchable fire, and the passage when rightly understood is a strong figure of utter and irremediable destruction. Other passages such

as Revelation 14 and 20:10 if considered with their context and the scriptural use of the word "for ever" in its relation to things human, will be found in no way to support a doctrine that is out of harmony with the whole tenor of Scripture statement.

With earnest heart and loving appeal, we ask you to face this question fairly, knowing well what the result will be in your life as it has been in ours, namely, a fresh incentive to serve with all the vigor of manhood and womanhood that you possess, this one great truth that "THE GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD."

THE ABOVE WAS FIRST published many years ago by the late M. W. Strang. It has been adapted by R. H. Judd to suit a wider circulation than its first arrangement permitted. Much good has been done in the past, and it is hoped it will meet a real present need in its new form.

Copies may be had from R. H. Judd, 111 Milverton Blvd., Toronto, Ontario; or National Bible Institution, Oregon, Illinois, at 15 cents per dozen, or 50 or more at 90 cents per 100.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.