

# Eternal Punishment



**A. W. Pink**

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Our lot is cast in a day when the truth of the eternal punishment of Christ-despisers has almost entirely disappeared from the pulpit, for though a verse or two thereon may occasionally be quoted in some places, where shall we go to hear a whole sermon on the subject? Some imagine that it is impolite to mention Hell but shall we pretend unto a refinement superior to the Scriptures? Some say sinners are not to be terrified into Heaven but won by the cooing of love: then why did the Lord Jesus speak so often of “the fire that never shall be quenched?” Others argue that such preaching would drive the people from the churches—fidelity and not popularity should be our aim. Certain preachers seek to excuse themselves on the pretext that the subject is so unspeakably awful they do not feel in a suitable frame of soul to handle it—then they should retire into their closets and beg God to fit their souls for the task and come not out till He does so.

It is far more than a mere coincidence that side by side with the disappearing of the truth of eternal punishment from the pulpit there is also the departing of the Spirit’s presence and power from the churches. We have heard it said, It is not the Spirit’s way to drive, but to draw. Yet *Christ* did not say that when the Paraclete should come He would “woo the world.” No, rather did He declare, “He will *convict* the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment” (John 16:8). Nevertheless the Spirit is pleased to use means—the Truth proclaimed by God’s servants. And what is better suited to beget in careless and callous souls a fear of sin and evil-doing than for the pulpit to announce in plain terms the fearful retribution which awaits the same? If the preacher maintains a studied and guilty silence thereon, on what ground shall the Spirit convict his hearers of their dire peril and their urgent need of fleeing from the wrath to come?

Side by side with the Spirit’s departure from the churches is the withdrawal of His restraining hand from the world. The masses have become bolder and more brazen in wrong-doing and protests against their iniquities fewer and weaker. Crimes which formerly were dealt with severely have become gradually tolerated and

winked at. Criminals are no longer regarded as rebels who must be made to feel the majesty of the law but are looked upon as objects of pity who should be reformed by gentle treatment. Corporal punishment has been banished from the schools. First offenders are let off with a “warning.” Lawbreakers are lightly fined instead of being sent to prison. Murderers are frequently reprieved. A generation has arisen which has no conscience of sin, no fear of the hereafter, no regard for the rights of others—who give free rein to their lusts and are quite indifferent as to what anyone thinks of or says to them.

There are more and more sound preachers expressing shock at the rising tide of evil—but what are they doing to stem it? They express their horror at the lawlessness which now abounds on every side but how far are they conscious that they and their unfaithful predecessors are largely responsible for it? If the foundations are removed what shall the righteous do? and if the awful doom awaiting the unrighteous be concealed from them, if they are encouraged to believe they may sin with comparative impunity, then what remains to check them in their sinning with both hands and drinking in iniquity like water? The *mercy* of God has been stressed and His justice ignored. His *love* has been emphasized and His wrath concealed. His character as Father has been exalted and His *office* as Judge disregarded—there are scarcely any now left who believe “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

Almost two hundred years ago conditions in Britain and America were well nigh as bad as they are today. The churches were as dead and heretical. Wickedness abounded in high places. The Sabbath was profaned on all sides. The masses were utterly indifferent to the claims of the Most High. And what was the turning point? What was it that produced such a radical change for the better? What was the chief means used by God when the Enemy had come in like a flood? The records of history give a plain answer. The Lord was pleased to raise up a handful of men who went forth proclaiming that God, “hatest all workers of iniquity” (Psa. 3:5) and that “the wicked shall be turned into Hell” (Psa. 9:17). Whitefield and his fellows in this country and Jonathan Edwards and his companions in New England dwelt mainly on the terrors of *Hell*, and the masses were sobered,

the churches revived, and many were turned unto God.

The Divine promise is, “them that honour Me I will honour” (1 Sam. 2:30) and God is not honoured by those who caricature Him and convey a false conception of His perfections. God is honoured by those who shun not to declare “*all* His counsel” and not by those who withhold those parts of it which are most distasteful to flesh and blood. God was superlatively honoured by His incarnate Son, and none ever portrayed the doom awaiting the damned in such vivid colours and unmistakable terms as He did. He who shall Himself be the Judge of the quick and the dead spoke of “the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29) and announced that He will say unto the lost, “Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). He it was who asked the Pharisees, “How can ye escape the damnation of Hell?” (Matt. 23:33). He it was that told of “the furnace of fire” where “there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 13:42). What right has any minister to be regarded as a servant of Christ’s if he is silent on such matters?

When the Lord Jesus commissioned His servants to “go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature,” He immediately added, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not *shall be damned*” (Mark 16:16). It is a great mistake to suppose that threats and terrors pertain alone to the Law of Sinai. Not so—a fearful punishment is annexed to the despising of *the Gospel*. Said the chief of the Apostles, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. 2:3). That there might be no uncertainty on the point, he declared in this same Epistle: “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 underfoot 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 we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense saith the Lord” (Heb. 10:28-30). And again, “See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven” (12:25).

Eternal punishment is an essential part of the Gospel message and

they who withhold it deal deceitfully with the souls of men and keep back an integral portion of the whole counsel of God. It is meet that the Gospel should be armed with solemn threats as well as attended with gracious promises. It is honouring to Christ, the Author and Centre of the Gospel, that it should be so. Christ is *King* of Zion, and a sceptre without a sword, a crown without a rod of iron would be impotent and useless. He has been given both. God has said to His ascended and enthroned Son, “Rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies” (Psa. 110:2). “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (Psa. 2:9). And it is because He has been invested with such power that the rulers of the earth are told to “Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling: Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little” (Psa. 2:10-12). “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel” (2 Thess. 1:7, 8).

We have by no means exhausted the contents of the Gospel by presenting Christ on the Cross as a Saviour for sinners, nor by proclaiming Him as the great High Priest who ever lives to make intercession for those who come unto God by Him. He must *also* be magnified as “King of kings and Lord of lords” who shall one day vindicate His honour and make a footstool of His enemies. He shall come forth in righteousness to “judge and make war,” having eyes “as a flame of fire.” “Out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations and He shall rule them with a rod of iron, and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (Rev. 19:11-16). It is therefore the duty of the evangelist to plainly warn the rejecters of Christ that He is unto them “a saviour of death unto death” (2 Cor. 2:16)—that is, the sentence of death passed upon them by the Law shall be aggravated by the additional wrath they incur because of their contempt of the Gospel.

A few words now upon the spirit in which this subject needs to be taken up. It becomes us to approach such a theme with *deep solemnity* of soul. Everything in the Word of Truth is sacred and calls for sobriety and seriousness of attention. But surely among all that God has been pleased to reveal to us, there is nothing which, in

its own nature, is so calculated to produce profound awe as Jehovah's announcements of His purposed vengeance on the rebels against His government—the revelation of the righteous wrath of the Almighty. A careless and flippant attitude ill-becomes either speaker or hearer on such a subject as this. Yet in no hesitant and excusing manner should the pulpit treat of it. This doctrine needs no apology on our part but a bold yet reverent witnessing thereto. If the preacher reminds himself that it is nothing but sovereign grace which has plucked him as a brand from the everlasting burnings, he will be delivered from speaking thereon in an unholy manner.

This is a subject which requires to be examined and handled *dispassionately*. Unless all prejudice is banished from our minds we shall view it through distorted lenses. Surely it ill-becomes worms of the dust to take their place at the feet of Infinite Wisdom, all the time determined to hold fast their own foregone conclusions. What more impious than to pretend to examine God's written revelation that we may learn His mind, when we have already predetermined the matter? A Puritan said that we ought to bring our mind to God's Word as blank paper is brought to the printing press, that it may receive only the impressions of the type. We need to get away from all systems of theology, abandon all prejudices and preconceptions, and seek only "What saith the Lord?" We need to approach this awe-inspiring subject in the attitude of little children, saying to God, "That which I see not teach Thou me."

This is a subject which needs to be investigated in a spirit of *confiding submission*. It is not at all a matter of what do the majority of professing Christians believe thereon. Nor is it a question of what appears to us to be most in accord with God's revealed character. It is not for us to decide what shall best vindicate the Divine benevolence and wisdom. How can the finite determine what most becomes Him who is Infinite? He who has known and believed the love of God will not question His love because he is unable to reconcile with it all that he is taught of God to believe. If I am incapable of understanding how an omniscient, omnipotent, infinitely holy and benevolent God should permit sin to enter this world, with all its attendant woes, then why should I be staggered by my inability to perceive the need for the penalty of everlasting punishment being passed upon those who die in their sins? There is

much in God's present Providences we cannot understand, yet we know that the Judge of all the earth does right and in the confidence of that fact we may trustfully bow to His decisions in the Day of Judgment.

## 1. Its Inflicter.

The One who passes sentence of eternal punishment upon the lost is the Lord God—in the exercise of His *vindictive justice*. Vindictory justice is that perfection in the Divine character which inclines God to punish sin according to its deserts, to render unto it the wages which are its due thereby clearing His own honour and establishing the majesty of His Law. The manifestative glory of God has been greatly sullied in this world. Consider Him as *Creator*. The greatest of His works in this mundane sphere is man, yet scarcely was he called into existence than he revolted against his Maker. Consider Him as the *Ruler* of this world. His laws have been made known only to be treated with utter contempt by those who have received them. Consider Him as the *Gracious One*. He sent forth His own dear Son into this world on a mission of mercy but the world hated and crucified Him. Nor was that crime peculiar to the men of the first century A.D., for by each succeeding generation of men since then Christ has been “despised and rejected.”

Now is the Most High to be mocked with impunity? Shall He regard with indifference the despising of His authority and the contempt of His grace? Are His majesty, His holiness, His omnipotence but empty titles? Shall His enemies defy Him forever? No, He has appointed a Day when He shall exonerate Himself and vindicate His great name. That solemn day has already been anticipated in part. From time to time God has interposed and given plain proof of His hatred of sin and His wrath upon sinners. At the beginning sentence was passed upon Adam and Eve and they were driven out of the garden of Eden. In the fearful flood sent in the days of Noah God made manifest His detestation of evil. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are “set forth for an example” of those who shall yet suffer “the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7). In the drowning of Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea the Lord evidenced the certain fate of all who shall fling themselves against the bosses of His buckler.

Yet fearful as have been God's judgments in the past they are but portents and a faint shadowing forth of that which is yet to come. They were for the most part local but finally shall be upon *all the wicked*. They were only upon the bodies of men, but shall be upon their souls as well. They were merely temporal but shall be eternal. "Thine hand shall find out all Thine enemies: Thy right hand shall find out those that hate Thee. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of Thine anger: the LORD shall swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them" (Psa. 21:8, 9). How little are the masses aware of what a terrible and loathsome thing *sin* is in the sight of the ineffably Holy One. The great multitudes all around us regard sin as a mere trifle, as though it were but a thing of today which would never come up against them in the future. They go on unconcernedly peacefully in their iniquities, as though God had no Book of Remembrance in which is recorded their every word and deed.

In His Word God has plainly made it known that He is not going to ignore the transgressions of His righteous Law but rather that He will judge every defiant rebel. "See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no God with Me: I kill, and I make alive, I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand. For I lift up My hand to Heaven, and say, I live forever. 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" (Deut. 12:39-42). That is the Lord's own solemn declaration, yet for all that is ever heard of it from the pulpit, it might not be in the Scriptures. Nevertheless, it is the declaration of Him who cannot lie and it shall most assuredly be made good in every detail.

Such a passage as the last quoted must not be regarded as revealing some blemish in the Divine character or blot upon His government. The justice of God is as truly a Divine perfection as His mercy, His wrath as His love. Because God is holy, He hates all sin; and because He hates all sin, His anger burns against the sinner. So far from the Scriptures making any attempt to conceal this Divine perfection, they speak *more frequently* of God's anger and



wrath than they do of His love and compassion and make no apology for His “fierceness” and “fury.” “The LORD is known by the judgment which He executeth” (Psa. 9:16), as truly as His wisdom and power are displayed in the wonders of creation.

When the Most High announced the destruction of the Moabites and Ammonites He said, “I will execute judgments upon Moab, and they shall know that I am the LORD” (Ezek. 25:11). Observe how this striking sentence, “they shall know that I am the LORD” is repeated in connection with His judgment upon Edom (25:14), the Philistines (25:16), Tyre (26:7), etc. Those decimating judgments are represented as conduct worthy of the Holy One, as displays of His vindictive justice.

The solemn truth which we are here considering is no invention of the Church in the dark ages of ignorance and superstition but is a revelation of Holy Scripture which gives light to all who receive it by faith. The Author of eternal punishment is not the Devil acting in the desperation of his malignity but the Lord God in the exercise of His *vindictory justice*. The One who made and sustains us and who shall yet judge us according to our deeds has an infinite abhorrence of sin and has evidenced the same by passing sentence of infinite severity upon it, which sentence will in due course be enacted upon every soul which has not fled to Christ for refuge. God has not left His enemies in ignorance of the indescribably awful doom awaiting them: He has in His Word solemnly and plainly announced, again and again, the inexorable retribution which shall overtake those who spurn His authority, trample upon His laws, and mock His ambassadors. He has placed within themselves a monitor which assures them that “they which commit such things are worthy of death” (Rom. 1:32).

Vindictory justice in the Deity has nothing in its nature inconsistent with His infinite goodness, as His infinite goodness has nothing in its nature inconsistent with His vindictory justice—for all the Divine perfections are harmonious, blending together as do the varied colours in the rainbow. It is generally lost sight of that the very love of God is “a consuming fire” *with respect to sin*. If the more holy a man becomes the more he abhors evil, then the greater his love for virtue the stronger his hatred of vice. How much more so must this be true of Him who is the Holy One. In His pure sight

sin is an infinitely odious, hateful, ill-deserving thing. Therefore as He announced, “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them” (Gal. 3:10). The malediction of the Most High rests upon every unpardoned transgressor of His Law. When a wise and righteous monarch puts a traitor to death, it is not because he takes pleasure in the destruction of his subjects but because he delights in the honour of his crown and the good of his kingdom.

The vindicatory justice of God was eminently displayed at the Cross. The incarnate Son who never did any wrong and in whose mouth was no guile became the Surety of His guilty people and God dealt with Him accordingly. The sins of the unjust were laid upon the Just and therefore did Divine justice exact full satisfaction from Him. God “spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up” (Rom. 8:32) unto a penal and painful death. “Awake O sword (He cried) against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My Fellow, saith the LORD of Hosts, smite the Shepherd” (Zech. 13:7). The awful wages of sin must be paid Him to the fullest—the righteous requirements of the Law shall not be abated one iota and therefore Christ was “made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). “It pleased the LORD to bruise Him,” He “put Him to grief” when He made “His soul an offering for sin” (Isa. 53:10). “All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over Me,” cried the Sinbearer as the storm of God’s judgment burst upon Him. “Thy wrath lieth hard upon Me” (Psa. 88:7), Christ exclaimed.

## 2. Its Design

In creation, in redemption, and in the destruction of the wicked, God has one grand end in view—*His own glory*. Whatever subordinate ends may be accomplished by the punishing of the lost, the principal aim which God has in view is the manifesting and magnifying of His own perfections. Yet it is only as we perceive the origin and true nature of the Divine government that this will be evident to us. Alas, the view which obtains almost universally in Christendom today is that the primary design of the Divine government is the good of its subjects, which is to confuse the ultimate end with a subordinate advantage. It is true that the creature can only be really happy while rendering full obedience to

the Divine Law but so far from that proving the Law was established because of its tendency to promote the felicity of its subjects, it merely makes plain those benevolent tendencies because the subject was adapted to the Law. The government of God was not adjusted to the nature and benefit of man, rather was man constituted with reference to it

To make the *creature* an end to the Creator and not the *Creator* an end to the creature is to turn things upside down, making that supreme which is subordinate and that subordinate which is truly supreme. The happiness of the creature was not the end which God designed in the promulgating of His Law—that was contemplated as an *effect*—a subordinate and incidental effect which would certainly follow from the accomplishment of the nobler purpose which actuated the Lawgiver. No, the true end of the Divine government, as in all the institutions of the Most High, must be sought not in the good of the creature, however much that may be promoted, but in the *glory of God*. That is the only object worthy of the Almighty, for it includes in itself all that is exalted in excellence, illustrious in truth, sublime in holiness. Because God is independent and self-sufficient, it is impossible that His manifold works should proceed from any other motive but the counsel of His own will. How blessed that this is so when we are assured it is the will of Him who is possessed of infinite perfections and unchangeable blessedness!

Why was God pleased to go forth into acts of creation? Was it not to reveal Himself, to declare what He is, to make known the attributes of His being, to manifest His glory by inscribing His character upon the works of His hand? When He made man was it not in His own image and likeness? Why did He give to man His Law? As a matter of expediency?—perish the thought! Was it not rather to make known the fact that to those creatures whom He has endowed with intelligence and moral accountability He sustain the relationship of *Ruler*? Through His Law a faithful and permanent exhibition is made of the eternal principles of rectitude and holiness which belong to the essence of the Godhead. Why did the Most High permit the entrance of sin into His domains? Must it not have been because its presence afforded more occasion for the *display of His perfections* than had its absence?—the wonders and glories of

redemption can only shine forth as evil supplies the dark background.

“For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever, Amen” (Rom. 11:36) is a Divine summary of all the institutions and achievements of Jehovah. “Of Him”—they are as their originating Cause: “Through Him”—they are as their Director and Sustainer. “To Him”—to His honour and glory they necessarily tend as their supreme End. Nor is the doom of the damned any exception. The government of God is founded in His right to exact obedience from His creatures and His Law reveals the requirements of His holy will. The punishment of those who transgress it is clearly revealed—“He will by no means clear the guilty” (Exo. 34:7)—is the authority of the Ruler, the majesty of His Law, the way He regards disobedience, the manifestation of His detestation of sin and His satisfaction unto His justice. In the everlasting fires of Hell will be displayed the inextinguishable hatred of God to all iniquity.

It is because sin has blinded men’s judgment that they do not perceive the glory of God is as truly evidenced in Hell by the damnation of the lost as it is in Heaven by the salvation of the redeemed. If the salvation of the latter be “to the praise of the glory of His grace,” the damnation of the wicked is equally to the praise of the honour of His holiness and justice. The fact is that the unregenerate are concerned only about their own private and personal interests, having no regard to the honour of God. But once a sinner is renewed by the gracious power of the Holy Spirit, He begins to see (though as “through a glass darkly”) the beauty of vindicatory justice. He is able to discern that “the ministration of *death*, written and engraven in stones, was *glorious*” (2 Cor. 3:7). As he is convicted of his sinfulness, he perceives not only that eternal punishment is his just due but that God had been honourable and glorious had he been made to suffer the due reward of his iniquities in the everlasting burnings of Hell.

But it is not only through an experimental acquaintance with Sinai that the believer discovers the glory of God’s punitive justice—it is also and supremely at *Calvary* that his eyes are opened to see the loveliness of that Divine perfection. As faith beholds the spotless Lamb bearing *his* sins, it also beholds the excellence of

Divine justice in smiting the Lamb. Filled with horror and anguish at the multitude and heinousness of his crimes, overwhelmed with wonderment that the Just should be willing to take the place of the unjust, through tear-dimmed eyes he perceives the grandeur of that justice which exacted full satisfaction from the Vicarious One. There at Calvary the eyes of faith perceive that “mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psa. 85:10). Though the preaching of Christ crucified is to the self-righteous Jews a stumblingblock and to the philosophic Greek foolishness, the *believer* glories in the Cross, for he sees therein the supreme display of all the Divine perfections!

Illumined from on high the believer perceives the evicting of the sinning angels out of Heaven down to eternal darkness and despair, the turning of our first parents out of Paradise and sentencing them and all their posterity to death and the final sentence passed upon the apostate at the day of judgment as so many glorious displays of the Divine character, punishing sin according to its deserts. It was such an illumined spirit which moved Moses to say—as he beheld Pharaoh and his hosts (types of finally impenitent sinners) dead upon the sea shore—“I will sing unto the LORD, for He hath triumphed gloriously . . . Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power; Thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy . . . Who is like unto Thee, O LORD, among the gods (or “mighty ones”), who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders!” (Exo. 15:1, 6, 11). In the execution of His vindicatory justice Jehovah appeared *most excellent* in the eyes of His servant.

God will receive infinitely more honour from the judgment which He will finally execute upon His enemies than He has received dishonour from all their rebellions. Their revolt was, comparatively, for a moment, but the penal satisfaction He shall exact will last through the endless ages of eternity. When mystical Babylon shall sink like a millstone into the sea under the vengeance of the Almighty and many shall be cast into Hell at that moment, there shall be heard “a great voice of much people in Heaven, saying, Alleluia, salvation and glory, and honour and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are His judgments, for He hath judged the great whore which did corrupt the earth with her

fornication and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia; And her smoke rose up forever and ever” (Rev. 19:1-3).

Because the vindictory justice of God is so excellent a Divine perfection it was a becoming and glorious thing in God to “bruise Him and put His soul to grief” who had espoused the cause of His elect and appeared as their Representative, even though He were His own Son—and for the same reason it was a becoming and glorious thing in the incarnate Son to say, “Thy will be done.” And since vindictory justice is a blessed and glorious perfection in God, He is altogether lovely—there is *no* blemish in His character. If it were otherwise it would be impossible to conceive of the Lord Jesus Christ making such a glorious appearance as He will at the Day of Judgment—rather would He be draped in sackcloth. In “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5), He whose meat it is to honour the Father shall without the least reluctance pronounce the final sentence on the wicked; yea it will give Him ineffable delight to put an end to the controversy which has existed between God and His rebellious subjects.

### **3. Its Nature.**

Under this head we do not propose to examine the constituent elements which will comprise the retribution visited upon the wicked: rather would we take note of its intrinsic character. From what has been said under the previous divisions there will be the less need for us to dwell upon this aspect of our subject at much length, yet we cannot ignore it entirely because it is at this very point that enemies of this truth are most accustomed to introduce their errors. Romanists are not alone in believing that the fires of “purgatory” have a purifying effect upon the souls of those who enter “limbo:” the great majority of Universalists contend that the final punishment meted out upon unbelievers is disciplinary in its character, that the Lake of Fire so far from being the ultimate Penitentiary of the universe is a grand Reformatory, and that after a season therein its inmates will emerge as purged of their depravity and fit to take their place among the citizens of Heaven

It should be sufficient refutation of such an opium dream to point out that there is not a single verse in all the Scriptures which

substantiates it. There are many, many verses which speak of the wicked being cast into Hell but there is not one which declares that any shall escape therefrom, or that after serving a term therein (be that term a brief or lengthy one) any shall come forth fitted to dwell with God's people. Not only is there nothing in the Word of God which warrants us to entertain any hope for those who die in their sins but on the contrary there is much which excludes, which utterly forbids, such a hope. The very nature of the punishment inflicted upon the finally impenitent cuts away all ground from under the feet of "Universalists," for the intrinsic character of it is *retributive* and not educative: the sentence passed upon the lost is a *penal* and *not a remedial* one.

The nature of God's punishment upon sin appears with unmistakable plainness at Calvary. There we behold One who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners" dying a criminal's death and what is infinitely stranger, suffering not only at the hands of men but of God, too. The Psalmist declared, "I have never seen the righteous forsaken" (37:25), but here is the Righteous One Himself forsaken of Heaven and earth alike! What is the explanation of this mystery? Why, the Righteous One had voluntarily taken the place of the unrighteous. The sentence which stood over the head of God's elect was "cursed are the guilty" and out of unfathomable love Christ interposed saying, Let that curse fall *on Me*. The elect of God were "by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:3), but Divine grace provided a deliverance for them from that wrath: not by making light of their sins, not by abolishing the penalty of His Law, but by admitting a Surety to take their place, assume their liabilities and being dealt with accordingly.

That is why Christ's perfect obedience was followed by such terrible punishment: fulfilling the requirements of the Law's precepts He must also endure its penalty. Being charged with His Church's guilt, He receives the wages which were due her. The justice which pursued God's sinful people smote their Substitute. Christ had presented Himself before the Divine tribunal on their behalf and God was avenged by Him for their crimes, wounding Him for *their* transgressions and bruising Him for *their* iniquities. The Saviour offered Himself unto God as a satisfaction for their wrongs and gave Himself a ransom for their debts. The sufferings of

Christ were punitive and propitiatory. The very *mode* of His death demonstrated the *penal nature* of it. Under the Mosaic law death by hanging on a tree was reserved for the greatest of criminals and Christ's execution on the Tree (1 Peter 2:24) was the public testimony that God's curse rested on Him (Gal. 3:13), that He endured the *wrath* of Jehovah! The sufferings which the Redeemer experienced were a *judicial* infliction, imposed upon Him by a sin-hating God.

It is not out of *love* to them that the wicked will be cast into Hell, as being designed for their ultimate happiness but rather that in them God means to "show His *wrath* and make His power known" as their being "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22). The righteous are considered as "wheat" but the wicked are likened unto "tares" and "chaff" and when it is said, "but the chaff will He burn with unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:17), it is certainly not for their refining or purifying. The "damnation of Hell" (Matt. 23:33) and being "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess. 1:9) are expressions very far from connoting a *process* of remedial discipline. "They that perish" (1 Cor. 1:18) and "which drown men in destruction and perdition" (1 Tim. 6:9) is language the very opposite of conveying the idea that the portion awaiting those who die in their sins is nothing worse than a means for their reformation. The "second death" (Rev. 21:8) closes the door of hope upon all who experience it.

It has been rightly pointed out that "Even in human governments, which contemplate the injury rather than the wickedness of actions, penal laws cannot be sustained upon the sole basis of expedience. Nothing can be punished as harmful which is not felt to be vicious" (J. H. Thornwell). That is true and it is both an instructive and solemn task to study history in the light of that fact, particularly the marked change for the worse during the last fifty years by those termed "Christian nations." Where the blessing of God rests on a people, side by side with His gracious power being exerted in the churches He quickens the public conscience so that crime is made odious in their sight and their moral instinct demands that it should be punished severely. Providence so orders things that self-interests and the good of the State make a majority feel that if evil is to be suppressed evil-doers must be dealt with a firm hand and thus God's



disapprobation of sin is reflected in the conscience of society.

Consequently, when the penal nature of Divine punishment is plainly and faithfully proclaimed, God's abhorrence of sin is held up to public view, and not only does this produce a salutary effect upon those who receive such teaching, but they in turn become the "salt" of society—staying the unregenerate carcass from utter corruption. Conversely, the disappearance of the doctrine of eternal punishment has had the most disastrous consequences upon the pew and the masses outside. Necessarily so—for when the Spirit is quenched in the churches His restraining hand is removed from the world, the fruits of which quickly become apparent. Conscience goes to sleep, moral sentiment is dulled, horror at evil-doing wanes. Judges are fearful of imposing adequate sentences lest they be regarded as heartless tyrants. Government becomes more and more lax, for the leaders know the masses will no longer tolerate stern measures and so expediency rather than moral principle shapes their policy. The outcome must be the complete breakdown of law and order unless God is pleased to intervene, either in desolating judgment or restoring mercy.

#### **4. Its Dreadfulness.**

If God is not slack in fulfilling His promises, equally certain is it that He will not be so in executing His threats. He has told us plainly in His Word how He regards sin and has faithfully warned us that He will by no means clear the guilty—that the penalty which He has pronounced shall surely be inflicted upon them. Sin, says the Lord, is that "abdominal thing that I hate" (Jer. 44:4) and the reality and intensity of His hatred will be evidenced by the vengeance which He visits upon it. Dreadful beyond words, beyond our power to conceive, beyond the bounds of human imagination will be the doom of the damned, even the "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7). Impossible is it for us to exaggerate the frightfulness of those torments which are prepared for the lost: the most blood-curdling descriptions which poets and artists have furnished of the same fall very short of the dreadful reality itself.

"Who knoweth the power of Thine anger? Even according to Thy fear so is Thy wrath" (Psa. 90:11). It will be seen from the title of this Psalm that *Moses* was the instrument selected by the Holy Spirit

for the writing of it, and his eminent suitability and fitness for this particular task appears in many of its details. Again and again he expresses therein that which comported with his own experiences and observations. Notably is that the case with the verse before us: Moses *had witnessed* the outpourings of God's anger and the irresistible power thereof as none belonging to any other generation (save Noah's) before or since has beheld. He had seen the horrible plagues upon Egypt, culminating with the death of all her firstborn. He had been a spectator of the destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea. He had been present when "there went out fire from the LORD and devoured" Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron (Lev. 10:1, 2) because they had used strange fire in the tabernacle. Awe-inspiring demonstrations were those of the wrath of a holy God burning against them who scorned His authority and insulted His majesty.

Well, then, might Moses exclaim, "Who knoweth the power of Thine anger?!" Had he not also been present when "the ground clave asunder" that was under the feet of Korah, Dathan and Abiram so that "the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah and all their goods: they, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the Pit, and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the congregation" (Num. 16:31-33)? He had witnessed the awful doom which overtook the unbelieving Hebrews when the Lord "swear in His wrath" that they should not enter Canaan, "whose carcasses fell in the wilderness" (Heb. 3:11-18). What terrifying exhibitions were these of the Divine displeasure! How impotent is the creature when the Most High rises up to smite him—less capable is he then of defending himself than is a worm to resist the tread of an elephant.

"God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries and He reserveth wrath for His enemies. Who can stand before His indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire and the rocks are thrown down by Him" (Nahum 1:2, 6). When the Almighty shall come forth to execute vengeance upon His enemies, the whole Creation will tremble and so intense will be the fire of His wrath that this world

and all that is therein shall be burnt up and its very elements “melt with fervent heat” (2 Peter 3:10). Then will be exposed those perversions and misrepresentations of the Divine character which men had fondly framed as a sop to their conscience and a salve to their fears. Then shall be swept away their refuges of lies that God is too gentle and merciful to ever make good His threats. No confederacy of His foes shall be successful in withstanding the storm of His fury—though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not pass unpunished. There will be no avenue of escape available—His goodness had been abused, His mercy refused, so that His wrath must then be endured.

The fearfulness of the punishment awaiting the wicked was adumbrated in the unspeakable sufferings of the Saviour. Divine justice dealt with Christ as the Substitute of His guilty people and there was meted out to Him the penalty which was due them. Had Christ been nothing but a mere creature the awful punishment visited upon Him had utterly crushed Him, but because God had “laid help upon One that is mighty” He was able to “endure the whole of wrath Divine.” Being God and Man in one Person, the Lord Jesus was capable of enduring infinite suffering—to endure compressed into a brief season that which shall be spread out through *all eternity* upon the wicked. How terrible the suffering which the Redeemer experienced is intimated in both Old and New Testament alike, where His inward anguish and His outward afflictions are made known to us. It is by solemnly and reverently pondering *them* that we are enabled to form some faint conception of the intolerable wrath which God pays out to sin.

Concerning the Redeemer’s passion we read of “the travail His soul” (Isa. 53:11)—that which His body received at the hands of men was nothing in comparison with what He experienced *within* from the hand of God. His inward anguish was evidenced when the full cup of God’s wrath was put into His hands. “Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say?” (John 12:27). He was put to such a strait that, considered as Man, He was in a manner nonplussed, at a loss for words. The horror of what lay immediately before Him was so great that He could not give expression to it. As our blessed Lord approached the Cross the horizon darkened for Him more and more. From earliest infancy He had suffered at the hands of man. From the

beginning of His public ministry He had suffered at the hands of Satan: but at the Cross He was to suffer death at the hands of *God*. Jehovah Himself was to bruise Him and put Him to grief, and it was *this* which now overshadowed everything else.

In Gethsemane Christ entered the awful gloom of the three hours of darkness at Calvary. There we hear the Holy One saying, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death . . . O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matt. 26:38, 39). He views the black clouds arising, He sees the fearful storm about to burst upon Him, He premeditates the unspeakable horror of being abandoned by God. “My soul is exceeding sorrowful:” the Greek signifies He was begirt with sorrow, that He was immersed in the anticipated wrath of Heaven. All the faculties and powers of His soul were wrung with anguish. Mark employs another form of expression, “He began to be sore amazed” (14:33)—a remarkable expression *that* to describe the God-man!—the Greek term denotes the greatest extremity of amazement, such as makes one’s hair to stand on end and flesh to creep. Mark adds, “and to be very heavy,” which intimates an utter sinking of spirit. His heart was melted like wax at the sight of the awful cup. Luke tells us that He was “in an agony” the Greek word meaning to be engaged in a combat, for His holy soul shrank from encountering the undiluted wrath of a sin-hating God.

So intense was the Saviour’s agony, that cold as was the night, His sweat was “as it were great drops of blood pouring down to the ground” (Luke 22:44), yet no hand of man was smiting Him! And here we perceive the fitness of the place chosen for the scene of Christ’s terrible but preliminary suffering, for “Gethsemane” means “the olive press”—the olive press being where the life blood of the olives was pressed out drop by drop. It was indeed a fit footstool to the Cross, a footstool of an agony unutterable and unparalleled. On the cross Christ actually drained the cup which was presented to Him in Gethsemane—producing that terrible cry—“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!” There it is we behold what a horrible thing sin is, what a terrible thing God’s wrath is, and what madness it is to contend with Him who will by no means clear the guilty. The death of Christ was “the wages of sin” and that death was a violent and cursed one which had extreme anguish of soul

and body going before and along with it. Said Christ, “For if they do these things in a green tree what shall be done in the dry?” (Luke 23:31). If God inflicted such sufferings upon the Holy One, what must be the portion of those who are full of sin, fit fuel for the flame!

Consider now the awful sentence itself: “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). Mark the Judge: this is none other than *Christ*, for “God hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained” (Acts 17:31). It is an error to suppose there is a greater austerity in the Father than there is in the Son toward sinners, imagining that the latter is easier to deal with than the former. So it is equally wrong to conclude the Son is more tolerant toward sin than is the Father, that He is more willing to acquit the guilty. The self-same One who cleansed the temple of its traffickers and who pronounced such awful denunciations upon the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23) shall in the Day of Judgment utter this irrevocable doom upon the wicked. Then shall they learn how terrible is “the wrath of the Lamb.”

“Depart,” says He to them. “Depart from Me,” the alone Saviour, the One you scorned, whose easy yoke you refused. “Depart from Me:” get out of My sight; I never wish to behold you again. “Ye cursed:” O what a malediction! You have cursed others and now you are cursed yourselves—cursed in your bodies and cursed in your souls. You are cursed of God, cursed of angels, cursed of the saints, and henceforth you shall curse yourselves for your folly and madness. All your curses shall now recoil upon your own heads. “Into everlasting fire:” the most fearful and tormenting of the elements. “Into everlasting fire” which because of its intensity is termed “a furnace of fire” (Matt. 13:42), even “the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (Rev. 21:8). The stench of the brimstone rendering it the more intolerable. It is “unquenchable fire” for the wrath of God is inextinguishable, and “everlasting fire” for an eternal God shall preserve eternally all who are cast into it.

No ordinary fire is this, any more than that which burned in the bush which consumed not (Exo. 3:2). It is a “prepared” fire, prepared by God. It is prepared “for the devil and his angels,” that

is, for God's arch-enemy and his fellows. Yet it is a fire which torments the body, evoking "wailing and gnashing of teeth." Nevertheless it is different from any fire now known unto man, for this infernal fire has no light or brightness attending it and those cast into it experience "the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 13). It is a fire which shall everlastingly burn and yet consume not its victims. As the bodies of the wicked as well as the bodies of the righteous are to be raised by God, so a miracle of Divine power shall be wrought upon the one as truly as upon the other. As the latter are vessels of mercy "prepared unto glory" (both their souls and bodies fitted for Heaven), so the former are "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22)—having both *souls* and *bodies* capacitated for enduring the everlasting fire.

"And these shall go away into *everlasting* punishment" (Matt. 25:46). The Greek word which is here rendered "punishment" is rightly translated "torment" in 1 John 4:18 ("fear hath torment"), which affords clear proof that so far from the wicked being annihilated or in a condition of insensibility they consciously suffer excruciating anguish. So also the words "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7): note the present tense of the verb—only one who is conscious is capable of "suffering." How dreadful that torment is may be gathered from other passages, as in "tormented day and night, forever" (Rev. 20:10). The same word is found again in "their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when he striketh a man" (Rev. 9:5)—the virulent poison of which produces horrible agony. In Revelation 12:2 it is employed to express the travail pangs of a woman "pained to be delivered." In Matthew 14:24 it is used to describe the experience of a ship in an angry sea, "tossed with waves." Said the demons to Christ, "Art Thou come to torment us before the time" (Matt. 8:29).

In addition to the agony entailed by physical suffering there will be unbearable mental anguish, for all the faculties of the soul will be preserved in the lost. The understanding, which had been atrophied by unbelief, shall then fully understand the sinfulness of sin and the madness of fighting against the Most High. The conscience, whose voice was so often silenced by the clamourings of pleasure, shall then perform its functions and be fully alive to the wrath of God. But most awful of all will be the workings of memory. O what

repining, what remorse, what self-condemnation shall fill the hearts of the damned as they recollect opportunities wasted, privileges abused, warnings spurned, entreaties despised! Then shall they recall those faithful sermons to which they turned a deaf ear and the offers of mercy they refused. Here they took no time to seriously consider the welfare of their souls and preparations for the hereafter but in Hell they shall have time enough, for there will be no other employments to hinder. When it is too late they will have no other work than to reflect and consider.

## 5. Its Duration.

We shall not attempt to enter upon a critical discussion of the Hebrew and Greek words which the translators of the King James Version rendered “eternal,” “everlasting,” and “forever and ever.” In the first place, we believe its translators were endowed with quite as much honesty and scholarship as any who have followed them, so that it would be both trivial and arrogant to challenge their renditions. In the second place, we are fully assured that the Providence of God so superintended the preparation of that particular version which was to prevail in the English-speaking world for three centuries, that its translators were graciously preserved from any serious errors. In the third place, any critical inquiry of the Hebrew and Greek terms is quite needless: the plain and unlettered man can verify for himself the accuracy of our English equivalents from collateral considerations which render him independent of the schools. When he reads, “these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal” (Matt. 25:46), he has no difficulty in perceiving that the suffering of the lost is as endless as the bliss of the saved.

Among the reasons which forbid us to believe that the wicked will ever be released from punishment and restored to the Divine favour are the following. First, *the nature of sin*. Sin and guilt are inseparably connected and therefore sin deserves punishment: if, then, guilt cannot be eradicated, the punishment must be interminable. Before the punishment could end the guilt must cease to exist and before a lost sinner can be guiltless his criminal actions must become innocent ones. But can vice become virtue even though a million years should pass over it? Vice and virtue, sin and

holiness are founded in the very nature of things and therefore must forever remain immutable so that what once deserved punishment will forever deserve punishment. As then the nature of sin cannot be changed nor its guilt obliterated, therefore the punishment of the damned must of necessity be eternal.

Second, *the character of the damned*. That their character is irremediably and irrevocably fixed is clear from many considerations. Their resurrection is termed “the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29) which expressly excludes all hope of their regeneration in the next life. The fact that their Judge shall say unto them, “Depart from Me ye *cursed*” intimates plainly there is no possibility of their reclamation. As we have pointed out earlier God’s aim in their punishment is not their personal benefit but the taking of satisfaction unto His vindictory justice. It is not to save but to destroy them that they are cast into the Lake of Fire. It is not to express His tender mercy but to manifest His indignation and wrath that the torments of Hell are designed. God’s end in chastising the righteous in this life and punishing the wicked in the next are diametrically opposite. Punishment has never softened the unregenerate. The plagues sent upon Pharaoh only served to harden his heart and the six thousand years of punishment which Satan has already experienced has not rendered him any less the inveterate enemy of God. The punishment of the damned will but confirm their malignant disposition. Therefore it is written in the very last chapter of God’s Word, “he that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still” (Rev. 22:11): as the tree falls, so will it forever lie.

Third, *the Atonement*. In previous sections we have appealed to the sufferings which Christ endured at the hand of God when He received the requital which was due the sins of His people—as proof of the nature of the punishment awaiting the wicked—that it is *penal* in its character and not disciplinary or reformatory. We have also directed attention to Christ’s sufferings as illustrative of the intolerable portion awaiting the lost: if the anticipation of bearing God’s wrath caused the Saviour such horror and anguish, moving Him to make supplication “with strong crying and tears” (Heb. 5:7) and making Him to sweat great drops of blood, how much more will feeble creatures sink down and be utterly



overwhelmed by God's vengeance? We revert once more to the Cross as indicating the *duration* of the punishment awaiting the damned. If the Sacrifice needed by the Church must be one of *infinite* worth, could her guilt be only of *limited* proportions? That sin for which none but an eternal Person could make expiation must have penal consequences of unlimited continuance. And since there "remaineth no more (further) sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:26)—when the Sacrifice of Christ has been spurned, then the doom of the lost is irremediable.

Fourth, *the never-dying worm*. In the space of six verses (Mark 9:43-48), during a single discourse, the Lord Jesus referred no less than five times to 1. "the fire that never shall be quenched" and three times to "where their worm dieth not," and never was He guilty of idle repetition. When a man dies and his body putrefies it breeds worms which prey upon his carcass—a fearful adumbration of that which shall afflict the souls of those suffering "the Second Death." That never-dying worm typifies the reflections of memory and the reproaches of conscience tormented by the wrath of God which will forever gnaw at the soul. This is "the sting of death" (1 Cor. 15:56) which "at the last biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder" (Prov. 23:32): unpardoned sin being the venom of death's dart. This expression at once gives the lie to the theories of annihilation and future restitution to happiness, for on either of these suppositions their worm *would* die. Christ affirms "their worm *dieth* not"—forever and ever finding that to prey upon in the lost. Consequently, we read, "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever" (Rev. 14:11) without cessation or termination.

## 6. Its Justice

It is at *this* point that the loudest outcries are made against the truth we are here engaged with. To the natural man it appears there is such an enormous disparity between the offense and its retribution that he deems the Divine Judge to be guilty of unrighteousness—as if the guilty criminal is the one best qualified to determine the fairness or unfairness of his sentence. What, he asks, can a human being do within the short span of his earthly existence which calls for endless sufferings as its recompense?—as though the criminality of actions is to be measured by the length of

time it takes to commit them! What proportion is there, he objects, between a whole lifetime of sinning, where that life is measured by a few brief years and *eternal* punishment? It has ever been thus. In the days of Ezekiel Israel complained, “The way of the Lord is not equal” (18:25). If, then, men have murmured at the equity of God’s *temporal* judgments we need not be surprised at their challenging the justice of His *eternal* judgment.

So long as the heart of fallen man remains in love with sin, while there is within him an inveterate hatred of the Holy One, until his mind ceases to be blinded by Satan it is impossible for him to view sin and its punishment in their true perspective. Not until a miracle of grace has been wrought upon him, not until he is made a new creature in Christ Jesus, is he capable of perceiving the “due reward” of his iniquities. Only when his sin-blinded eyes are opened, when spiritual vision is vouchsafed him, in those moments when in God’s light he is enabled to “see light” can he in any measure discern the righteousness of God’s claims upon him and the infinite enormity of failing to meet those claims. Only then does he begin to apprehend the ineffable holiness of the One with whom he has to do, the immeasurable “sinfulness of sin” and the illimitable extent of its ill deserts.

Above we have said that only “in those moments” when the regenerated soul is permitted to “see light” in God’s light is he enabled to perceive the “due reward” of his iniquities, for even the vision of the believer is blurred as soon as communion with God is severed, yea, at best he sees now “through a glass darkly”—in comparison with the vision which will be his in the glorified state. Much of the time even the Christian perceives not the exceeding sinfulness of sin (constituting as it does so large a part of himself) and in proportion to that failure he is incapable of discerning the equity of Divine retribution and is disposed to feel that God acts with undue severity both toward himself and with his fellows. It is useless to deny this, for it is a fact of which every renewed heart is conscious and is made to mourn because of its opposition to the Divine government. Let us illustrate what we have in mind by two examples taken from Holy Writ.

When the sacred ark was being brought home from the land of the Philistines, the oxen stumbled and the ark shook and Uzzah put

forth his hand to steady it—when he at once fell to the ground a mangled corpse, smitten by the hand of God (2 Sam. 6:7). Was not Uzzah actuated by an excellent motive? He could not bear to see the sacred ark fall into the mire. And is not the reader stunned, staggered, as he learns of the terrible retribution which overtook such an apparently trivial offense? Take again the “man of God” who so fearlessly rebuked Jeroboam for his idolatry and so faithfully delivered the Divine message to him. The king was so moved that he invited him to go home with him and refresh himself but he refused because that was contrary to the orders of God. Later, he encountered an old Prophet in Bethel who assured him that the Lord had bidden him to eat and drink in his house. Deceived, the man of God did so and immediately after a lion met him by the way and slew him for his disobedience (1 Kings 13:24).

Though the Christian is fully assured that the Judge of all the earth can do no wrong, yet such incidents as the above are apt to perplex him, for unless he is able to view them in God’s light he is at a loss to discover how the punishment fits the crime. Ah, my reader, that is because we fail to perceive that Jehovah sees not as man sees. God recognizes the evil to which we are blind. God never exaggerates our sins but looks upon them as they actually are, as the “abominable thing” which He hates (Jer. 44:4). Equally strange may it appear to us that the entire human race would be ruined by a single act of our first parents. If so, it is because we see not what a black, vile, abominable thing SIN is. The least sin of thought or imagination is so heinous that God would be perfectly just if He banished us to Hell the moment we gave place to the same. Sin is an immeasurable evil. If the mere act of touching the ark brought death upon Uzzah then what a desperate evil sin must be!

Had the entire human race been sent into hopeless perdition no slur had been cast upon the Divine character, no breach made in the integrity of the Divine government, no wrong inflicted upon the creature. The fact is that we are utterly incapable of measuring the contrariety and opposition there is in sin unto Divine holiness. God alone knows what is the real demerit and desert of sin. We seek not to convince the objector of these things but to establish the believer in them. First, then, let it be pointed out that God’s will is the rule of all righteousness and therefore whatsoever He does is righteous.

God is answerable to none, gives no account of His matters and is not to be measured by any human standard. Where reason fails us faith must hold fast to the Divine perfections.

Second, there is a principle of evil in the sinner which eternally tends to sin and therefore it is but just for God to punish the sinner eternally: the duration of the punishment corresponds with the disposition of the delinquent. If the sinner were permitted to live on this earth forever he would dishonour God forever, transgress His Law forever, despise Christ forever, do despite to the Spirit of Grace forever. How just, then, that God should punish the sinner forever. Sinners sin as long as they can and did not His grace put a stop to their lusts, their hearts would never put a stop to them. The sinner's will to sin is everlasting, how just then that his punishment should be so. The torments of Hell will produce in them no change for the better, and as their impenitency is endless so is their doom. Therefore does God say, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still, and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still" (Rev. 22:11).

Third, sin entails infinite guilt. God is infinitely worthy of love, honour and obedience and therefore our obligation to render the same unto Him is infinite. Since God is infinitely glorious our obligation to avoid the least sin against Him is infinitely great. Consequently it necessarily follows that the evil of sin is infinite and therefore it deserves infinite punishment and the very perfections of God require that it should have its due reward. Since there is in sin an infinite evil, it is meet that God should infinitely hate sin and be the infinite enemy of it and that the expression of that hatred should be suited to His character. Penalty is levied according to the dignity of the person wronged: to strike a common person is an offense—to strike the king is far more heinous—but to rise up in rebellion against the King of kings incurs infinite guilt and punishment. Since the creature cannot bear an infinite punishment intensively, he must bear it extensively: that is to say, by suffering it eternally.

Fourth, the wicked will only experience that which they personally chose. While they lived on earth the means of grace were available and those means set before them. Heaven and Hell, glory and misery, eternal life and eternal death as inevitable alternatives. If they chose the latter in preference to the former, they have only

themselves to blame. If they preferred “the pleasures of sin for a season” rather than those “pleasures which are at God’s right hand forever more,” they can only now curse themselves for their folly. An all-sufficient Saviour is set before them in the Gospel but they declared, “we will not have this Man to rule over us.” Having despised the riches of Divine grace it is but equitable they should suffer the severities of Divine justice. When the Lord expostulated with them they answered, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways” (Job 21:14). How equitable, then, that He should yet say to them, “Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire.”

How just it is that the wicked should suffer in the same everlasting fire which God had prepared for the Devil and his angels. Every descendant of Adam does by his actions and his continuance in sin justify Satan in his rebellion against the Lord God. Therefore it is most equitable that those who die impenitent should be confined with him in the same prison and be tormented under the same expression of Divine wrath. Sin is a cursed work for it is nothing less than enmity against the Divine government and it is this which rendered Satan and which renders his subjects accursed. For the curse of God to seize such is most righteous, nor do the demons call this into question (Matt. 8:29). And how meet it is that the sinner should suffer physical torment as well as mental anguish. When his body is put into the grave he has not done with it forever: it shall be raised “to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2), for as it was partner with the soul in sin, so it shall be sharer with the soul in punishment.

## **7. Its Aggravation.**

Man enters this world a sinner (Psa. 51:5), yea, a cursed sinner (Rom. 5:18), for we are all “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3); nevertheless he is born under a government of mercy and a way of escape is set before him in the Gospel. Christ is freely offered to men and if the very chief of sinners surrenders to His sceptre and trusts in His atoning blood there is deliverance for him: “This is a faithful saying and worthy of *all* acceptation: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*” (1 Tim. 1:15). O the marvel of Divine grace: that God should make overtures of peace

unto His enemies and send His own Son here to die for the ungodly! How much greater, then, must be the guilt of those who despise and reject Christ: “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light” (John 3:19). As an added condemnation is incurred, so a severer punishment is ensured: “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto Heaven, shall be brought down to Hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee” (Matt. 11:23, 24).

A Shelter is provided against the coming storm, a Hiding-place better than of caves and rocks (Rev. 6:15), a City of Refuge where there is perfect shelter from the sword of the Avenger—but woe be unto those who scorn that provision of mercy. “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?” (Heb. 10:28, 29). As there will be degrees of honour and bliss in Heaven—some vessels of mercy having a larger capacity than others—so there will be degrees of torment in Hell: “That servant, which knew his Lord’s will and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall he beaten with few” (Luke 12:47, 48). Far worse shall it be for those in Christendom who die impenitent than for those in the darkness of heathendom. According to the talents bestowed, the opportunities afforded, the light vouchsafed, privileges enjoyed, so is our responsibility. And in proportion to our neglect of such blessings so is our criminality and the measure of our criminality will determine the degree of our torment.

From what has been before us we may perceive.

1. *The pressing duty of the preacher.* He is required to proclaim not only the blessings of the Law but its curses also and to set forth the inevitable alternatives attending our response to the Gospel—salvation to those who believe it—damnation to those who believe

it not. It is his business to cry Fire! fire! escape for your lives! If to spare his own feelings or in order to be popular with his hearers he remains silent about eternal punishment, God will yet require their blood at his hands. "Because there is wrath, beware lest He take thee away with His stroke; then a great ransom cannot deliver thee" (Job 36:18): that summarizes his message to the unsaved. The forerunner of Christ warned his hearers to, "Flee from the wrath to come" (Luke 3:7). The Saviour Himself bade men, "fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell" (Matt. 10:28). His Apostles were actuated by this solemn motive: "knowing therefore the *terror* of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). If I see my neighbour's house smoking shall I not rush in and warn him? and shall not the watchmen of Zion sound the alarm as men go heedlessly unto the everlasting fire?!

2. *The vileness of sin.* This is something which the present generation has no conception of. Crime is committed without compunction and when detected is dealt with leniently. Lying, theft, drunkenness, immorality have become so common that they are no longer regarded with abhorrence. If wrong-doing between man and man is looked upon with such tolerance and penalized so lightly, then sin against God is scarcely thought of at all. God is not a solemn reality today: if He is believed in at all He is considered as a kind and indulgent Being who is far too loving and merciful to deal severely with His erring creatures. O what a rude awakening is in store in the Day to come! My reader, form not your estimate of sin from the common sentiments prevailing among your deluded fellows: measure it rather by the fearful threats of the Almighty: ponder it in the light of eternal punishment. The wrath of God is no vain scarecrow as you will yet discover unless you fly to Christ for refuge.

3. *The state of the world.* This world which lies in the Wicked One is a vast madhouse. Who but those who are bereft of their senses will sport on the edge of a precipice where but a single step divides them from a horrible and painful death? Yet that is precisely the case with the masses all around us: bent only on pleasure, with the Bottomless Pit waiting to receive them! Mental derangement is but a shadow of the spiritual insanity which possesses the souls of

the unregenerate. What a solemn word is that of the prodigal in the far country: “When he came to himself” (Luke 15:17)—previously he was beside himself. See yon poor lunatic with a wreath of straw on his head and stick in his hand proclaiming himself a king: equally crazy are they who seek satisfaction in the honours and riches of earth. Mad, indeed, are they who live as those without a soul, who think not about eternity, who crave only to eat, drink and be merry—while the fires of Hell are being kindled for them!

4. *The value of the Gospel.* The darker the night the more welcome the stars. The more desperate the disease the more desirable a competent physician. The graver the danger the more appreciated a deliverer. It is upon the ink-black background of sin that the glories of Heaven’s evangel shine forth. It heralds a Divine Redeemer who came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), to deliver Hell-deserving and Hell-bound sinners. It assures those who submit to its terms, “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18). As water to the parched, as a lifeboat to drowning seamen, the Gospel makes known an all-sufficient Saviour to the vilest creature on earth if he will throw down the weapons of rebellion and be reconciled to a holy God. The blood of Christ can cleanse the foulest—put your trust in that Fountain which has been “opened for sin and for uncleanness” and you shall prove its saving efficacy.

5. *The need of redeeming the time.* Delay is the height of folly when nothing but the frail thread of life prevents your dropping into Hell. That thread may snap at any moment, and then you are lost forever. “Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart.” O you who are so headstrong, whose will is so obstinate, whose passions so desperate, know you not that you are preparing to dwell eternally in that place where peace and happiness are total strangers? You who are determined to have your fill of pleasure are but filling up the measure of your iniquities and preparing with all diligence to be fit companions with Satan in everlasting woe. Those who are now burning in their lusts shall soon burn in the Lake of Fire unless they repent and seek God’s pardoning grace. Then seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.



The damned are now bewailing the opportunities *they* neglected!

6. *The call to self-examination.* The Puritan Thomas Brooks states that in his day, “Some devout people caused the words ‘Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?’ (Isa. 33:14) to be written in letters of gold over their chimney pieces.” Well may each of us solemnly and seriously inquire, Shall *I* be among that Eternally doomed company? It is the part of wisdom to make sure of the foundation upon which our hope of deliverance rests. “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Prov. 30:12). Self-deception is perilously easy, for we are ever ready to give ourselves the benefit of any doubt. Something more than outward religion is needed. Have I renounced my own righteousness as filthy rags? Am I trusting in Christ? Do I hate sin? Is inward depravity my greatest grief and burden? Am I daily seeking grace to deny self, mortify my lust, and please God?

7. *The praise due unto God from His people.* If I am a brand which has been plucked from the burning, what thanksgiving is due unto the Lord! If my blind eyes have been opened, if my hard heart has been softened, if my stubborn will has been broken, how deeply indebted am I unto *sovereign grace*! If I have been brought out of nature’s darkness into God’s marvellous light, made to see and mourn my waywardness and sinfulness and had placed within me a new principle or nature which causes me to hunger and thirst after righteousness and pant for communion with and conformity to the Lord, how immeasurably am I indebted to His distinguishing mercy! In such case must not thanksgiving be expressed in *thanksgiving*! If my feet have been turned Heavenward then I must act as a stranger and pilgrim here. If Christ has “delivered me from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10) then my chief concern should be for a greater love and likeness to Him.

