

form of chastisement, and other like elements proper to be considered in such a problem, is there not serious reason for saying that the nature of man furnishes in fact but little foundation for hope as to his spiritual restoration in a future state,—that the overwhelming preponderances of evidence in the case, viewed from this point solely, must rather be that, dying in sin, man will remain a sinner, and therefore a condemned sinner, even forever?

(2.) The argument derived from the nature of the Gospel is obviously of loose construction, and of doubtful effectiveness. It is true that Christianity seems not only unexhausted but inexhaustible,—that as a saving scheme it would need neither addition nor change were the whole race, instead of a portion, to be saved through it. It may be true, though it has not been proved, that this blessed Faith is capable of presentation and of application among the dead; and that, if such were the divine choice, sinners might, perchance, be rescued from sin and guilt through it, in that new and, to human view, mysterious state. But if all men are not, under that divine choice, permitted to learn of this faith in this life, how can we infer that all men will be permitted to do this in some future form of existence? And if, among those who do hear of Christ in this world, there are many who resolutely reject Him, and die in unbelief, how can we infer that most, or all, of these will pursue a different course in another world, under the action of the same class of influences? In fact, are not these reasonings from the universality and the absoluteness of Christianity, not only as uncertain and fragile on natural grounds as they are without distinct warrant in Scripture, but also in large degree illusive and dangerous both in what they assert and what they imply? It is not safe to assert for Christianity, viewed as a form of religion, anything more than the Bible asserts for it; it is not wise to claim for it an extent of scope or of application beyond that which its Founder has clearly defined.

(3.) Arguments from the nature of God also need to be carefully scrutinized, and very thoughtfully applied—especially at points where, as is admitted, we have no explicit divine teaching to guide us. God is His own interpreter, and the Bible is His interpretation, alike of His character and of His administration. That He will deal justly with all men—with dying infants, with the heathen, with such as perished in the Deluge, as with us—we may be fully assured. That He will inflict punishment wherever He sees it to be deserved, and especially wherever men revolt against His grace; and that punishment will continue as long as sin lasts, though it be forever, we are also fully assured. That God is merciful as well as just, and will deal in tenderness with all, even with the incorrigibly wicked, we are confident; and that such manifestations of mercy will always be harmonized with the demands of equity, and will go no farther than righteousness