

Pastor and People.

Everlasting Punishment No. II

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This shall go away into everlasting punishment. Matt. xxv. 46.

II. I am now in the second place to establish the truth of the doctrine of the Church on this subject.

Before bringing forward the desired proofs, I would like to make a remark on the nature of the evidence to be advanced. If the truth of the doctrine was to be established by a series of arguments, each one depending on the other, the whole proof would then be like a chain consisting of a certain number of links—some stronger and some weaker, and the strength of a chain would in that case have to be determined by the weakest link, but in this case, the proof being direct, there is only one link, and all the strength is centered in it. Or rather, it may be compared to a cable, composed of several cords and plies, and these in turn, of fibres of various degrees of strength, to which a certain weight is attached. One single cord of the cable might be sufficient to bear the whole weight itself, but this is not necessary, for the weight is attached to the whole cable. Now surely no one who on minute inspection should discover that some of the fibres were weak or worthless, would be entitled on that account to say that the cable could not bear the weight put upon it, when in truth its strength would not be materially affected thereby. So in the arguments I may this morning adduce some will be weaker, and some will be stronger, but the weight of the evidence must be estimated by combining the whole. Each separate and independent argument will contribute its own share of strength; and if any one should discover that some one of the arguments is weak and worthless, he is not on that account entitled to claim that the whole evidence is demolished.

1. My first line of argument is of a negative kind, viz., the absence of any hint in the Scriptures of the future restoration of the wicked, or any change in the condition of the lost.

If a time should ever come in the history of our race when all sin and suffering should come to an end, and all God's intelligent creatures be restored to His love and favor, all His enemies be transformed into friends, sin and suffering be no more, death be abolished, and hell extinguished, this would surely be the grandest thing that has ever occurred in the known history of the universe; a redemption far greater than that achieved on Calvary, a salvation more complete than the salvation of part of the human race at the close of the present dispensation. Supposing this to be true, how does it come that we have no hint of it in the Bible; how does it come that that revelation which unveils to us so much of the future world should be silent on this point; how does it come that a restoration so grand and glorious, should be left to the inventive genius of a few speculative minds, instead of being brought out into the full glory of the sunlight. If any hint of such a thing should be given anywhere, we would naturally expect to find it where the last judgment is spoken of, but we look in vain for any indication of the sufferings of the lost coming to an end. The day of judgment is emphatically called the last day, and is so called by Christ himself. It is true that the present dispensation is often spoken of as the "last days," and is so called because it is the last dispensation of the divine mercy—there is no other to follow; but where the expression, "last day," is applied to a point beyond the bounds of time, by Him who knows the end from the beginning, we have reason to believe that it will in the strictest sense be the "last day," and that no change in the condition of man will ever follow. But if at any point beyond that day, the wicked shall be brought back to the love and favor of God, then, the day of judgment could not in any proper sense be called the last day. Then, when we come to read the description of the judgment given in Matt. xxv, there is everything to indicate that the result will be final. The period of probation is past, the character of men is fully developed, the sheep are separated from the goats, the judge is seated upon the throne, and the sentence is pronounced. Now, the King is omniscient, and cannot be deceived in the character of any; He is just, and the sentence will be in accordance with truth. It will not therefore be like a human sentence, which may be based upon insufficient and unreliable evidence, may be unjust, and may afterwards be reversed. In the judgment of the King, there can be no error, no mistake, and no appeal, and therefore the sentence must stand. And when the awful words are pronounced, "Depart from me ye cursed," there is not the slightest hint that they will ever return again. In the parable also of the ten virgins, recorded in the same chapter in which the judgment is described, we notice also the absence of any hint of change in the future state of those who sin away their day of grace. When the foolish virgins neglected to procure oil till it was too late, and their case is seeking admission, we read, that "the door was shut;" and there is no hint that it ever would be opened; for to their frantic appeal, "Lord, open to us," come the dreadful response, "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not;" as much as to say, "Too late, too late, ye cannot enter now."

2. My second line of argument will consist of some general considerations, drawn from reason and Scripture, and the operation of certain well known principles and tendencies, which go to show that the punishment of the wicked will be eternal.

(a.) The doctrine of eternal punishment is in harmony with the divine perfections, so far as these are revealed to us. All His glorious perfections are infinite; He is infinite in power, in wisdom, in goodness, and in truth. In this probationary state, His dispensation towards men are of a mixed character. Even His own people can sin of mercy and of judgment. On the whole, mercy prevails over judgment; for while the Lord delighteth in mercy, judgment is His strange work. But in this life, His mercy to His own people is restrained by the mingling together of the

righteous and the wicked—by the growing together of the tares and the wheat, and by the necessity of disciplinary trials and afflictions, to promote the spiritual well-being of His people. And on the other hand, His wrath is most time stayed by reason of the righteous found among the wicked, lest in rooting up the tares the wheat also might be destroyed; and by the necessity also of preserving the world itself, as well as ungodly men, for the purpose of completing the probation of His own. Though the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness, yet meanwhile, the operation of the curse is limited; and while the term of probation lasts, when a sinner returns from the error of his ways, God repenteth Him of the evil. But in the future state, there will be an entire separation of classes—of the righteous from the wicked, of the sheep from the goats; and then there will be no restraint upon the exercise of the divine mercy on the one hand, or the divine judgment on the other. The righteous will be perfectly blessed, and hence their happiness will be eternal, and the wicked will be utterly cursed, and hence we have reason to believe, that their punishment will be eternal.

(b.) Another argument is drawn from the essential tendency of sin to increase and multiply itself. Nothing can be more apparent than the tendency of every form of evil to increase and multiply, unless counteracted by some powerful, restraining force. Every bad habit formed becomes a new germ of evil, of wonderfully prolific power. Were it not for the restraining influence of divine grace, and the mighty power of God's Spirit, this world would long ago have been completely overrun with evil, and the remains of virtue lingering amid the moral ruins of the fall, entirely swallowed up. But bad as the world is, it is not utterly abandoned. God's Spirit strives with men, and in some measure, restrains the wickedness of all. And if we suppose that some men may reach that crisis in their spiritual history, when they are utterly abandoned of God—when His grace and spirit are withdrawn, and they are left to themselves, still, they are in a world where they are surrounded by much that is good, and are therefore not in a condition to manifest fully the natural tendency of evil to multiply itself. But in the future state, when the wicked are utterly abandoned of God, when His grace and spirit are entirely withdrawn, and the natural tendency of evil is left unrestrained to manifest itself; and where all outward restraints are removed, so that there is nothing to hinder the full development of evil, then we may suppose that men will become more and more wicked, and go farther and farther away from God, instead of returning to Him. And if it be true, that all sin deserves punishment, in any part of the Almighty's dominions, whether in this world, or the next, it will follow, that if man go on sinning, they will go on suffering, and if they go on sinning for ever they will also go on suffering for ever.

(c.) We derive another argument from the fact that suffering in itself has no cleansing power. There may be an impression on the minds of some, that there is some cleansing or purifying efficacy in suffering; but a moment's consideration will show that this is a mistake. It is true that disciplinary trials and afflictions are found beneficial to God's people, but that is not because of any virtue in themselves, but because of the accompanying grace vouchsafed. Where affliction is not sanctified, the result is not beneficial, but the reverse. Instances have no doubt come under the notice of us all, in which pain and suffering have left a man more hardened than before. His heart has risen up in rebellion against God, his hatred to everything good is intensified, and he has become more hardened in sin, and more impervious to every good influence. This fact of itself, shows the absurdity of purgatorial fire to cleanse the souls of the departed, remove the stains of sin, and prepare for the presence of the Lord. Now in the place of woe, the influence of divine grace will be removed, and the natural effect of suffering will be, to harden men more and more in their sins, to intensify their hatred, to increase their wickedness, to develop every evil passion, and strengthen them in their rebellion against the most High. If therefore men will remain impure and unholy, they cannot be restored to the love and favor of God, or brought to the enjoyment of the blessedness of heaven, for the pure in heart alone shall see God; and if they not only remain unholy, but possibly increase in wickedness, they must ever remain under His wrath and curse, and their sufferings be eternal.

(d.) Another argument may be drawn from the perversity of the human will. The perversity of the will, is one of the strangest facts of our present sinful condition. It is in this practically, that the difficulty of our return to God lies: "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." We cannot see very far into this mystery, but so far as we can see, by the light of Scripture and our own religious experience, it is clear that nothing less than the mighty power of God can overcome the resistance of the human will, and bring the sinner a willing captive to the feet of Jesus Christ. "My people shall be willing in the day of my power." Did we not know to the contrary, we might suppose, that men's experience of the ways of sin and consequent misery—for the way of transgressors is hard, would make them willing to return to God, but the very reverse is the case. The deeper men sink in sin, and the more misery they experience in consequence, the more unwilling they are to return. Take for example the drunkard; the deeper he sinks in the mire of intemperance, and the greater the misery he brings upon himself, the more hopeless is his case; the deeper he sinks, the more unwilling, and because unwilling, the more unable to return to the paths of virtue. Thus we find, that pain and suffering are unable to overcome the perversity of the human will. The same principal will no doubt hold in the future state; the deeper men will sink in sin, and the more misery they will in consequence experience, the more unwilling they will be to return. And since in the present state, all the various motives brought to bear upon the will so seldom avail to move it God-ward, what power and in-

fluence would be required in the future state to effect this purpose, it is impossible for us to conceive. And since we have no hint of any such supposable means being employed, we are left to conclude that the will of man will be left in its perversity, and that the misery of the wicked will be eternal.

3. My third line of argument will consist of inducences from Scripture passages. (a.) In I Cor. xv. 24, we read "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power, for He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." Whatever may be the meaning of this important passage as a whole, one thing seems clear, viz., that a certain mediatorial office or power, called here "the kingdom," has been committed into the hands of Christ, for the redemption of men; but when the end cometh, the mediatorial kingdom shall be given up into the hands of the Father, the purpose for which it had been given, being accomplished, viz., the gathering of His own redeemed people out of every kindred, people, tongue, and nation, and bringing them safe to glory; and the putting down of all authority, rule, and power. It cannot be the giving up of His essential kingdom as a divine Being, that is here spoken of, for He cannot divest Himself of that without ceasing to be God. The inference then is, that His mediatorial kingdom being given up, he will be no longer mediator between God and sinful man. He will no longer send forth His Spirit to convert men, or impart His grace to prepare men for heaven; He will no longer send forth His servants with the message of mercy, saying "turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die;" He will no longer say with His own loving voice, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." In a word the means of salvation which men now so abundantly enjoy, will not be available then; there will be no mediator through whom the guilty might draw nigh to God—no great high Priest within the veil to intercede for sinners; all access to God, every mode of approach will be cut off, and the means of salvation being wanting, salvation itself will be impossible. The only means of salvation that we know anything about, are confined to the present life; and if these are neglected, all hope is cut off, and men must for ever remain in his condition of sin and misery, and his punishment be eternal.

(b.) Heb. x. 26, "For if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." We have seen that the means of salvation through a Redeemer now available, will not be available in the future world; but then it might be asked might not the means which are now so efficacious, be again repeated? might there not be another probation? might not the great sacrifice be offered up again? but this passage seems to close this door of hope—"there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." And this gives emphasis to the oft repeated statements of Scripture, that Christ was offered once for all. Since God cannot forgive sin without an atonement, else Christ would not have died, and since the present sacrifice for sin will not be available in the future world, and since the sacrifice of Christ will not be again repeated, and since we know of no other conceivable way in which the wicked can be restored, it follows, that they will be left absolutely without the means of deliverance, and therefore their punishment will be eternal.

(c.) Matt. xii. 31-32, "Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him, but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." In the parallel passage in Mark, we have the expression, "but is in danger of eternal damnation," yet we cannot find any argument on this latter clause, as some copies read, instead of "eternal damnation," eternal sin. One truth at least this passage makes perfectly clear, that there are some sins which will never be forgiven. The only way revealed to us in which sin can be forgiven, is through the atonement of Jesus Christ, but if the sacrifice of Christ avails not in the future state, and sin is unforgiven, then it must be punished, else the justice of God would be set at naught; and if the sin itself is eternal, the punishment must also be eternal.

(d.) Matt. v. 26, "Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." Compare also Matt. xviii. 24, "And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due unto him." It is evidently the teaching of Scripture, that God is determined by the necessity of His nature to punish all sin, either in the person of the sinner, or his substitute. In the case of the believer, sin is punished in the person of Christ; but the unbeliever must suffer the punishment of his sin in his own person. These passages teach, that he must suffer the whole penalty, whatever that may be; he must pay "all that is due," even "the uttermost farthing." How much that is, we have no means of knowing, for we know not the ill-desert of sin; the likelihood is, that the sinner will never be able to pay the whole debt, and his sufferings will thus be eternal.

(e.) The last passage I will refer to is Matt. xxvi. 24, "The Son of Man goeth as it is written of Him, but we unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed, it had been good for that man if he had not been born." These words were spoken by Him who knew the whole life of Judas, not only on earth, but his whole existence in the great future; and we have every reason to believe, that this expression relates not merely to his short life on earth, but to the whole of his existence. If then Judas repented truly, and was forgiven—as some would have us believe—these words could not in any sense be true; and if Judas was lost, and we admit that at some future time, after a period of

suffering, his punishment should come to an end, and he be restored to the love and favor of God, we cannot see how these words could be true either; for no matter how long he should suffer, it would still be a limited period, to be followed by an eternity of bliss; and an eternity of bliss will far outweigh a limited period of suffering, and therefore we infer, that those of whom this can be truly said must suffer for ever.

4. My fourth line of argument consists of positive assertions of the eternity of future punishment. This is the sure ground upon which the doctrine rests. By this one argument alone, the truth of the doctrine may be established; but the conclusion thus arrived at, may be strengthened by the other considerations to which we have referred. As this argument will turn, partly on the meaning of certain Greek words, it will be necessary for me to name these, so as to make myself intelligible.

Our first proof here is from the Greek word *aiōnios*, which we translate "eternity," and *aiōnion*, which we translate "eternal." The word *aiōn* is applied to God in I Tim. i. 17, "the King eternal," or king of the eternities; and in Rev. i. 18, it is applied to Christ, who is "alive for evermore," and in both these cases, it must mean eternity in the absolute sense. In nine cases this word is applied to the happiness of the righteous, and must also denote absolute eternity: is it not then reasonable to suppose, that in the five instances in which this word is used to denote the punishment of the wicked, it has the same meaning? Again, the word *aiōnion* is applied to God, Rom. xvi. 26, "the everlasting God," and to the Holy Spirit, Heb. ix. 14, "the eternal Spirit," and in both of these cases it must mean eternal in the absolute sense. This word is used in the New Testament altogether, I believe sixty-six times. In fifty-one of these instances, it is applied to the happiness of the righteous; twice as we have seen, it is applied to God; six times it is applied to miscellaneous objects in which its meaning is clear; and seven times it is applied to the future punishment of the wicked. Thus it appears, that out of sixty-six times in which the word is used, in fifty-three of them it must mean endless; and when we find this same word, which is used to express the lifetime of the Almighty, and to describe the happiness of saints in glory, applied also in the same manner to the future punishment of the wicked, the conclusion is unavoidable, that the punishment of the wicked must be endless. And as if to put this matter beyond the possibility of a doubt, we have this same word *aiōnion*, not only in the text, but in the next clause of the verse. Our translators used different words in the two clauses I suppose, just to vary the expression, but the Greek word is the same in both; and it would be contrary to all recognized rules of interpretation, to take the word in a limited sense in the one clause, and without any good reason, in an unlimited sense in the other. The conclusion is therefore irresistible, that if the happiness of the righteous is eternal, so also is the punishment of the wicked.

(b.) A second argument is derived from the Greek word *aiōdios*, which signifies for ever, or everlasting. This word is twice used in the New Testament. Once in Rom. i. 20, where it is translated "eternal," "God's eternal power and godhead." The other instance is in Jude vi., where it is applied to the angels who kept not their first estate, and are reserved in "everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day." The argument here is that the punishment of the rebel angels is everlasting, they are reserved in "everlasting" chains. Now we find from the Scriptures, that man is to share the punishment of rebel angels. "Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." If therefore the punishment of the angels is eternal, and man is to share this punishment, it follows, that man's punishment must be eternal also. If it be asked why the punishment of the wicked, if really eternal, should be expressed in words which are in any case capable of a limited meaning, it must be answered, that the Greek language contains no other terms better suited for the purpose. Words suited to set forth God's eternal power and godhead, must be held as adequate to set forth either the endless happiness of the redeemer, or the endless misery of the wicked. The sacred writers were under the necessity of setting forth the truth, in terms such as the language in common use furnished; and suppose they intended to set forth the proper eternity of hell torments, the words they employ are just the proper ones to express it. It is true, that by a combination and repetition of words, the doctrine might be set forth beyond the possibility of calling it in question, but this is not done with any doctrine, and if done in this case, and not in others, it would furnish men with a pretext to call in question every other revealed truth not similarly expressed.

(c.) A third and last argument under this head is, that the eternity of future punishment is clearly affirmed by certain figurative expressions, which in the ordinary way in which we understand language, can only have one meaning. Of these expressions some are more striking and terrible than others, but it may be truly said, that they are about the strongest which language can furnish. In some cases indeed there is no figure used, but a plain direct statement, similar to the statement in the text. Such for example is Matt. xviii. 3, where it is said, "It is better for thee to enter into life half or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire." The word here used is *aiōnios*, the same word that is used in Rom. xvi. 26, and is there translated the "everlasting God." In the parallel passage in Mark ix. 43, the words are, "It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands, to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched," or more literally unquenchable fire. Now, whatever may be thought about the nature of hell fire, whether we are to understand it literally, or figuratively, there can be no doubt about its duration. The word employed to designate its duration, *aiōdios*, signifies unquenchable; and

unquenchable fire must be eternal fire. In the 14th verse of the same chapter, the expression is slightly varied, "the fire is not quenched," which is a positive affirmation, that the fire will never die, and therefore be endless. In the 44th, 45th, and 48th verses of the same chapter, we have a threefold repetition of a very striking figure, which, however it may be interpreted, must be held as positively affirming that the misery of the wicked will be eternal. "Where their worm dieth not." From the close connection of this clause with the following, "and the fire is not quenched," it is obvious that it is only another mode of expressing the same truth. The figure is taken from the worm preying upon the carcases of men slain in battle. The carcases are supposed to be so numerous that the worm will never cease to devour them; and whether we interpret the figure to mean the pains of hell fire, or the remorse of conscience, or the self accusations and reproaches of the sinner, the meaning, so far as the point we are now considering, will be the same—the gnawing of the worm will never cease, the misery of the wicked will be eternal. Again in the Book of Revelation xiv. 10, 11, it is said of those who worship the beast and his image, that "he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb, and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." The words here "for ever and ever," are the same words used in the 1st chap. of this same book, to express the lifetime of the Redeemer, who is alive "for ever more." Let no one say here, that the smoke of the fire may be eternal, but not the sufferings of those thrown into it, for it is expressly stated, that "he shall be tormented," and the smoke of their torment will ascend for ever and ever. And then it is said in the next clause, that "they have no rest day nor night," which evidently means in this case endless, for a somewhat similar expression is used to denote the active, loving, joyful service of the saints in glory. Looking at all these various statements and expressions as a whole, if they do not mean eternal punishment there, it would seem, that human language is not capable of affirming anything; if these statements do not mean eternal punishment it may well be asked, What do they mean? or what would God have us understand by them? If God be true, and does not deceive us, there is no other alternative but to accept these plain teachings on this awful subject, in all their fullness, and bow to the authority of the inspired word. Putting then the whole evidence together, by the legitimate use of the faculties God has given us, in the interpretation of His revealed will, we come to the conclusion that the punishment of the wicked will be eternal.

III. Consequences of denying the doctrine of eternal punishment. We have only time left us for a few very brief remarks on this point. An indirect way of establishing the truth of a proposition, is by showing, that if it be denied, consequences will follow at variance with known truths; if the conclusion be known to be false, and the reasoning be legitimate, then the premises must be false. On the same principle, assuming the theory of Restoration to be true, if consequences follow which are at variance with the revealed truth of God's word, we are warranted to infer that we proceed from wrong premises.

(1.) If the proper eternity of future punishment be denied, and we hold that at some indefinite time in the future, sin and suffering will come to an end, it must follow, that devils also will be saved; but not only is this a mere assumption but it is contrary to the express declaration of Scripture, that they are "reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day."

2. If the doctrine be denied and the theory of Restoration adopted, it must necessarily modify the whole system of Christian truth. All the doctrines of Scripture are so related, that the modification of one, and especially of one so fundamental as the eternity of future punishment, necessarily modifies our views of the other doctrines of revealed truth. If we believe that after an indefinite period of suffering the wicked will be restored to the love and favour of God, then we may well ask, why the necessity of Christ's atonement? if men by ages of suffering can expiate their own sins, then, why did Christ die at all? So it is clear, that the eternity of punishment is closely connected with the atonement, and right views of the person of Christ. It is true, that one man may doubt the eternity of future punishment, and yet hold firmly by the other doctrines of Scripture; but it does not follow, that another adopting his views on this question will do the same; he will be more likely to follow out his theory to its logical results. This is proved by the fact that the theory of Restoration is usually associated with Unitarianism, Universalism, or some such system, which we believe to be in many things, very wide of the truth.

3. If the eternity of future punishment be denied, it leaves no logical stand point between Christian faith and absolute scepticism. If a man does not accept the plain and positive teaching of Scripture on this subject, with equal reason he may reject the teaching of Scripture on any other subject; the same process of criticism by which the force of Scripture statements on this subject may be avoided, would suffice to avoid the force of Scripture teaching on any other subject; if it is allowable to dilute or explain away the statements of Scripture in regard to the punishment of the wicked, so with anything else found to be disagreeable to depraved human nature, and thus the authority of Scripture would be set at naught, and the very foundations of our faith be overthrown. The Bible would be regarded as teaching nothing certain, or rather as teaching what any one would choose to have it teach. Or if on the other hand, we should question the validity of those rational processes by which we interpret Scripture, we strike a blow at all truth, and are launched on a wide sea of absolute scepticism.

(4.) The denial of this doctrine would weaken the awful restraints with which God has been pleased to uphold the authority of