

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON THE FUTURE  
PUNISHMENT OF SIN.

III. THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE.

IN this paper I shall continue and complete my exposition of the teaching of St. Paul touching the fate of those who die unsaved.

The present participle, ἀπολλύμενοι, found also in 2 Thessalonians ii. 10, 2 Corinthians iv. 3, is in 1 Corinthians i. 18, 2 Corinthians ii. 15 placed in contrast to another similar participle, σωζόμενοι. These participles, frequently used of the saved and the lost, represent salvation and destruction as processes now going on. They who are in "the way leading to life"<sup>1</sup> experience day by day the operation of a power which keeps them safe from peril and is bringing them to the safety of heaven; whereas they who tread "the way leading to destruction" are day by day undergoing a process which will end in ruin. With equal appropriateness, the one are in Ephesians ii. 5 said to be already "saved," and of them St. Paul says in Romans v. 9, 10 that they "will be saved," and the others are spoken of in Luke xix. 10 as already "lost," and in 2 Thessalonians i. 9 as men who at the coming of Christ will "pay the penalty of eternal destruction."

Another word almost or quite equivalent to *destruction* is used by St. Paul to describe the future punishment of sin; and is usually rendered *corruption*. It seems to denote *damage* of any kind, especially, though perhaps not always, such damage as involves ruin. The cognate verb we have already, on page 26, found in a quotation from Plato, as an equivalent for *destruction*, to describe a dissipation or disso-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vii. 13, 14.

lution of the soul. In 2 Corinthians vii. 2, St. Paul says for himself and his companions, "We have *corrupted* no one." But he expresses in chapter xi. 3 a fear lest his readers' thoughts be *corrupted* from the simplicity which has Christ in view. In 1 Corinthians xv. 33 we have a quotation from a Greek poet asserting that "bad company *corrupteth* good manners." The present participle occurs in Ephesians iv. 22, where "the old man" is said to be *undergoing-corruption*. So 1 Timothy vi. 5, 2 Timothy iii. 8: "men *corrupted* in mind." In these two last, all thought of annihilation is absent. St. Paul cannot mean to suggest that sin tends to extinguish the intelligence. The cognate substantive is used in Colossians ii. 22 to describe the destruction of food by eating. In 1 Corinthians xv. 42, the body laid dead in the grave is said to be "sown in *corruption*:" but the Apostle assures us in verse 53 that "*corruption* will put on *incorruption*." The decay of the natural objects around us, and the limits thus imposed on their development, are described in Romans viii. 21 as "the bondage of *corruption*." In 1 Corinthians ix. 25 the "*corruptible* crown" is a withering garland of leaves. And such withering by no means involves annihilation. As a warning to some whose wrangling threatened to injure the Church, St. Paul asserts solemnly in 1 Corinthians iii. 17 that "if any one *damageth* the temple of God, him God *will damage*." So in Galatians vi. 8, he declares that "he who soweth for his own flesh shall from the flesh reap *corruption*."

The close similarity of the words we have rendered *destruction* and *corruption* prevents our adding much from the latter word to the information already in our first paper derived from the former touching St. Paul's conception of the punishment awaiting sinners. But the use of this exact synonym is additional proof that the fate of the lost presented itself to the great Apostle chiefly in the aspect of utter ruin, of the destruction of all that gives worth to

humanity. And some of the passages quoted above prove that this second conspicuous word used by St. Paul to describe the punishment of sin does not in itself imply annihilation.

Another remarkable feature of the teaching of St. Paul, of St. John, and of our Lord as recorded in each of the four Gospels, now demands our most careful attention; *viz.* the word *life*, and especially the term, *eternal life*, used to describe the state of the saved as distinguished from the unsaved. Sometimes believers are said to have been already made alive in Christ, and to have life as a present possession: at other times life is spoken of as a hope for the future.

In Ephesians ii. 5 we read that "God hath *made-alive* with Christ us who were dead." So John iii. 36, "He that believeth on the Son hath *eternal life*." And chapter v. 24: "He that believeth . . . hath *eternal life*, and . . . is passed out of death into *life*." Similarly chapter vi. 47, 54. And 1 John v. 12: "He that hath the Son hath the *life*."

More frequently the word *life* refers to the future. So Romans ii. 7: "To those who by way of perseverance in good work seek glory and honour and incorruption" God will give "*eternal life*." In chapter v. 17 we read, that "they who receive the gift of righteousness will reign in *life*." To those who have been liberated from the bondage of sin "the end" will be "*eternal life*," which is "the gift of God:" chapter vi. 22, 23. They who "put to death the actions of the body *will live*:" chapter viii. 13. And they who "sow for the Spirit will from the Spirit reap *eternal life*:" Galatians vi. 8. Hence in Philippians ii. 16 the Gospel is called "the word of *life*;" and in chapter iv. 3 we read of the "book of *life*." In 1 Timothy vi. 12, 19, men are bidden to "lay hold of *eternal life*," and of "that which is really *life*." In 2 Timothy i. 1 we have a

promise of *life* in Christ Jesus," who (verse 10) "has brought to light *life* and incorruption through the Gospel." Similarly in Titus i. 2, iii. 7, we have "hope of eternal *life*."

In the Fourth Gospel and in the First Epistle of John the same terms, *life* and *eternal life*, in the same sense as in the above quotations from St. Paul, are very common. Nor are they uncommon in the Synoptist Gospels. Matthew vii. 14 has already been quoted. In chapter xviii. 8, 9, our Lord contrasts "entrance into *life*" with being "cast into the eternal fire." In chapter xix. 16, 17 one asks what he shall do in order that he "may have *eternal life*;" and the Teacher replies, "If thou wishest to enter into *life*, keep the commandments." And in verse 29 He speaks of some who "will inherit *eternal life*." We read in chapter xxv. 46, that in the great day some will "go away into *eternal life*." Similar teaching is attributed to Christ in the Second and Third Gospels. Compare Daniel xii. 2: "Some will awake to eternal life."

That this remarkable phraseology is found in documents so widely different in phrase and thought as the Epistles of Paul, the Fourth Gospel, and the Synoptist Gospels is complete historical proof, even apart from the authority of Holy Scripture, that the words we are considering were actually used by Christ to describe the reward of righteousness. Moreover, this use of the word *life* to describe the state of the righteous as contrasted with that of the wicked, implies that *life*, in the sense given to this word by our Lord and by St. Paul, is not the inalienable possession of all men, good and bad. And this is confirmed by the fact that, although the word *life* is used to describe present bodily life on earth, it is never once used throughout the New Testament to describe the future state of the lost. Beyond the grave there is no life except for those who are in life-giving union with Christ. On the last day they who

have done evil<sup>1</sup> will go forth from their graves, but they will have no share in the "resurrection of *life*."

In Matthew vii. 13, 14, "the way leading to *life*" is contrasted with that "leading to destruction." Similarly, in John iii. 16, we have the contrast, "may not *be destroyed*, but may have *eternal life*." Another contrast is given in verse 36: "He that disbelieveth the Son shall not see *life*; but the *anger* of God abideth upon him."

Another contrast to *life* is *death*, spoken of sometimes as present, at other times as future. So in Ephesians ii. 1, Colossians ii. 13, men still living are spoken of as "*dead* through trespasses." A dissolute woman is said in 1 Tim. v. 6 to be, even while *living*, *dead*. So in 1 John iii. 14: "We have passed out of *death* into *life*. . . . He that loveth not abideth in *death*." On the other hand, we read in Romans vi. 21, 23, "The end of those things is *death*," and "the wages of sin is *death*." And chapter viii. 13, "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall *die*." All this we understand. Inasmuch as they are beyond human help, as a dead man is, the unsaved may be spoken of as already *dead*. But inasmuch as only the future will reveal the awful destruction awaiting them, they may be described as on the way to death.

We now ask, What light does this phraseology cast upon the future punishment of sin? What is involved in the life already possessed by, and in fuller measure awaiting, the children of God; and in that death which is the wages and end of the service of sin?

Evidently the death which is the punishment of sin is, in its full development, much more than the death of the body. For this is the common lot of all men, good and bad. Nevertheless, since the word *death* was originally and is most frequently used to describe the end of bodily life, from this common use must be derived its meaning when it

<sup>1</sup> John v. 29.

describes the present or future state of the unsaved. What then is our chief idea of the death of the body? Not annihilation. For a body which has ceased to breathe is just as dead if preserved by the embalmer's art as if reduced to dust. And the Greeks spoke of slain men as *dead*, even though some writers, *e.g.* Homer, believed that in another state of existence the departed are still conscious; without any thought even of the ultimate cessation of consciousness.

What then is the idea conveyed by natural death? I think that it is the cessation of the normal existence of a certain conspicuous class of objects, and their consequent utter ruin. This class of objects is distinguished by well-known characteristics which go to make up our idea of *life*. A corpse is *dead* because the normal existence of a living body has ceased. It is true that sickness also is abnormal. But health passes into sickness by imperceptible gradations; whereas bodily death is marked off from life by a broad and unmistakable line. To pass that line is to the body absolute ruin. And this ruin is natural death.

Already we have seen that in the New Testament the word *destruction* denotes utter and hopeless ruin, whether the object destroyed be annihilated or maintains a worthless existence. We saw also that the same word was a common synonym for natural death, even with men who believed that the dead were still existing and conscious. It is now clear that the death which is the punishment of sin is a synonym of the word *destruction*, which already in my first paper we have found used in the same sense. It is utter and hopeless ruin of body and spirit. As such, it may be spoken of as present. For sinners are in a state of ruin, from which they can be saved only by the hand of Him who raises the dead. Or it may be spoken of as future. For present ruin will then receive its tremendous consummation.

Perhaps I may add that, just as the corruption of a dead body sinks infinitely below the worst corruption of disease,

so we are compelled to believe that the consummation of punishment will go far beyond the worst moral corruption on earth.

It is also worthy of note that, just as bodily death is separation of the body from the unseen and inward principle which was once its life, so spiritual death is separation of man from Him who is to all intelligent creatures the Spirit of life.

Having thus in some measure and with some confidence determined the meaning of the word *death* when describing the punishment of sin, we shall now be able to determine the meaning of the word *life* when describing the reward of righteousness. Since death does not imply annihilation, there may be existence and consciousness without life. Of this we have a good example in the slain heroes whom Ulysses, as we read in the *Odyssey*, met and conversed with in the realm of the dead. These had consciousness and intelligence, but not life. Life therefore is more than existence and consciousness.

Now St. Paul tells us in *Romans vi. 23* and elsewhere, that *eternal life* is the gift of God in Christ to those who believe. But this by no means implies that all others will sink into unconsciousness at death, or at judgment, or ultimately. For there is a life higher than that of the body. And this higher life is the hope of the children of God. It includes not only conscious existence, but blessedness. Consequently the loss of blessedness is the loss of this higher life. And that this higher life belongs only to the saved is no proof or presumption that all others will sink into unconsciousness. For the loss of life is simply the loss of all that which gives to existence its real worth.

Great confusion has been poured on the subject before us by the common use in popular religious language of the word *immortality* to describe continued conscious existence of the soul after death. This popular use of the word is

utterly alien to the phraseology and thought of the Bible. The confusion caused by it warns us not to use the words of the Bible in a sense never found there. Whether or not the soul of man possesses an essential permanence and consciousness which neither death nor the lapse of long ages will destroy is a fair matter for research. But such permanent consciousness ought never to be confounded with the immortality which Christ brought to light through the Gospel, and which He gives to those who receive Him as their Saviour and Lord. The popular phraseology is not Christian, but Jewish or pagan. Something like it is found in Josephus, *Antiquities*, book xviii. 1. 3; still more in the *Phædo* of Plato; and the very words, "immortality of souls," in book i. 31 of the Tusculan disputations of Cicero. To avoid confusion and error, it should be banished from theology and the pulpit.

It has often been asked whether Adam was created mortal or immortal. I venture to say that he was neither the one nor the other. When God breathed into him the breath of life, he became a *living* soul. And that primal life was blessed. His continuance in life was made contingent on his obedience. By disobedience he fell under the dominion of death. But they who receive the gift of righteousness will reign in life through Jesus Christ. That life will be a full development of the life in which Adam was created.

‡ The frequent use of the word *eternal*<sup>1</sup> to describe the *life* awaiting the servants of Christ sheds some light upon its significance when describing the *destruction* awaiting the wicked. We have seen that in 2 Corinthians iv. 18 it denotes a very long period of time in contrast to a short period: "for the things seen are temporal; but the things not seen, eternal." Now, apart from the meaning of this word, unquestionably the life of the righteous will be absolutely endless. For it will be an outflow of the life and the

<sup>1</sup> See p. 34.



love of Christ. To conceive a limit to the blessedness of those whom God predestined from eternity to be conformed to the image of His Son, is to set bounds to that infinite love; and this is impossible. "He shall reign over the house of Israel to the ages: and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke i. 33). We notice now that the adjective *eternal* is selected by St. Paul and by every writer in the New Testament except St. James to describe this endless life. And we notice with awe, that this word, with these associations, is selected by St. Paul and others to describe also the destruction of "those who know not God and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus; who will pay penalty, even *eternal destruction*." This seems to me complete proof, in addition to the proof already found in the words "whose end is destruction," that ultimate restoration of those condemned at the great day lay altogether beyond the hope or thought of the great Apostle.

One more point in the teaching of St. Paul demands attention. In Romans ii. 5 he says to a man of impenitent heart, "Thou art treasuring for thyself anger in a day of anger and of revelation of God's righteous judgment." This implies that day by day the impenitent man is increasing the punishment awaiting him at the great day. The same is implied in 2 Corinthians v. 10: "That each may receive the things done in his body, . . . whether good or bad." For if recompense is according to action, it will vary with the infinite variety of guilt. This variety implies consciousness continuing beyond the great assize. For if the punishment then inflicted were unconsciousness, it would be alike to all. Consequently the fate of the lost cannot be immediate annihilation.

The Epistle to the Hebrews does not add very much to the teaching of the Epistles which bear the name of Paul. In Hebrews vi. 2, among the first principles of Christ we find *eternal judgment*. This is evidently condemnation

to the eternal destruction spoken of by St. Paul. In verse 8 we have land "bringing forth thorns and thistles, whose *end*<sup>1</sup> is to be burnt." Similarly in chapter x. 27 we read of "a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which will devour the adversaries." These two passages introduce an important element of teaching which will come before us more clearly in the Gospels, and which I hope to discuss in my next paper. In verse 29 we are warned against a "worse punishment" of which "they will be counted worthy who have trampled under foot the Son of God."

Such are the results of our research into the teaching of St. Paul touching the future punishment of sin. His chief thought about it was conveyed by three synonymous terms, each commonly used to denote the end of human life on earth. Of these terms, two are used also to describe injury of any kind so serious as to render worthless the injured object. And we saw that bodily death was, by many Greeks, conceived to be, not extinction of consciousness, but loss of all that makes life worth living.

In one passage this destruction is said to be the end of those destroyed. In another it is said to be eternal. This last word we found to denote duration either lifelong or reaching beyond the limits of the speaker's thought. We noticed also that the same adjective is used to describe the endless life awaiting the people of God. All this compelled us to believe that St. Paul looked upon the condemnation to be pronounced on the great day as ruin, complete, hopeless, and final.

We found several important passages in which the Apostle speaks of the Divine purpose of salvation as embracing all men. But we found nothing suggesting the actual ultimate salvation of all men, nothing to set against the proofs just given that he expected some men to be finally lost.

Compare Phil. iii. 19, 2 Cor. xi. 15.

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Beyond the assertion of their utter ruin, we have little information from the pen of the Apostle touching the state of the ruined ones. We have nothing asserting or suggesting that they will be, even ultimately, annihilated, or that their consciousness will ever cease. For the words used to describe their fate are frequently used of objects which, although destroyed, indisputably continue to exist, and some to think and speak. And, although life beyond the grave is the gift of Christ to those who receive Him, we saw that, since the life which He gives is much more than existence or consciousness, the loss of that life by no means implies loss of conscious existence. On the other hand, the words *destruction* and *corruption* and *death* by no means imply the continued existence of that which is destroyed. As to what becomes of it, they leave us in complete ignorance.

The only information about the state of the lost given by St. Paul is, that their punishment will vary with their guilt. And this implies that the destruction inflicted at the great day will not be immediate annihilation. It must therefore involve conscious suffering.

In this comparative reticence of the great Apostle there is profound solemnity. Before his reluctant eye looms a vision of ruin. In that dark vision he cannot find a single ray of light. He therefore cares not further to analyse it; but turns away to greet the life eternal, the gift of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>1</sup>

In our next paper we shall consider a type of teaching very different from that of St. Paul, and preserved for us in the Fourth Gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. vi. 21-23.