

removed without the camp and burned, so those who cling to the Levitical system can have no part in the great Christian sacrifice which was offered up on Calvary outside the gate of Jerusalem. To share in the benefit of that sacrifice you also must go outside, no matter what it may cost. Here once more we note the affinity between the writer of our epistle and the Apostle Paul in pressing on half-hearted Christians prone to compromise the inexorable "either—or." "Either the law, or faith," said Paul; "Either the Levitical ritual, or the one sacrifice of Christ, offered through the eternal Spirit," says the unknown inspired man who wrote this marvellous book.

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*NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON THE FUTURE
PUNISHMENT OF SIN.*

V. THE SYNOPTIST GOSPELS.

In the Synoptist Gospels, punishment by fire at the end of the world occupies a position much more conspicuous than it has in the Epistles of Paul and in the Fourth Gospel. This conspicuous element of New Testament teaching demands now our careful attention.

The Baptist, as recorded in Matthew iii. 10, Luke iii. 9, compares worthless men to barren fruit trees which are "cut down and cast into fire." Similarly, in Matthew iii. 12, Luke iii. 17: "He will gather His wheat into the garner, but the chaff He will burn up with fire unquenchable." This last word denotes evidently an irresistible destruction, from which there is no rescue. It is found again in a more terrible context in Mark ix. 43. The fate of the barren trees is re-echoed word for word by Christ in Matthew vii. 19. Similarly, chapter xiii. 30: "Collect first the tares, and bind them into bundles to burn them up,

but gather the wheat into My garner." The slight variety of metaphor makes more conspicuous the element common to all these passages; *viz.* the destruction of vegetable matter by fire. And, than this, no destruction is more complete and final.

In Matthew xviii. 8 we have the phrase, "cast into the eternal fire;" and in chapter xxv. 41, "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." And already we have seen that the word *eternal* denotes duration extending to the speaker's mental horizon.

In connexion with the metaphor now before us, we find, in Matthew v. 22, "the Gehenna of fire." The word *Gehenna* occurs again in verses 29, 30, "cast into Gehenna;" and "the Gehenna of fire," in chapter xviii. 9. So chapter x. 28: "Fear Him that is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna." The same word is in Mark ix. 43 used as an equivalent of "the unquenchable fire." It is found also in Luke xii. 5. Thus in each of the Synoptist Gospels the Valley of Hinnom is used as the symbolic locality of the future punishment of sin.

This singular reference to a valley close to Jerusalem is explained in Jeremiah vii. 31: "They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire." Similarly, chapter xix. 4-7: "Because they have forsaken Me, . . . and have built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons in the fire for burnt offerings unto Baal: . . . therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that this place shall no more be called Topheth, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of Slaughter."

Whether or not the victims of these idolatrous sacrifices were burnt alive, we do not know. But our Lord's use of the metaphor of fire to describe the punishment of sin suggests irresistibly intense suffering, like that caused by

burning. For the metaphor is evidently designed to teach the tremendous punishment awaiting sinners. But the mere burning of one already slain adds nothing to the punishment inflicted. It is therefore impossible to doubt that our Lord, as His teaching is recorded in the passages quoted above, used the word *fire* in order to convey the idea, not only of irreversible ruin, but of intense suffering.

This idea of conscious suffering in connexion with the metaphor of punishment by fire is placed beyond doubt, and is thrust into marked prominence, in Matthew xiii. 42: "Shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be the wailing and the gnashing of teeth." The exact repetition of these words in verse 50 adds to their awful significance. The wail of anguish proclaims, in language which cannot be misunderstood, the conscious torment of those who suffer this fearful punishment. The same words are found again, in chapter xxiv. 51, as a description of the lot of the hypocrites; and in chapters viii. 12, xxii. 13, xxv. 30 as a description of "the outer darkness." The occurrence six times of this remarkable phrase, in five chapters of the First Gospel, reveals its large place in the thought of Christ, and the deep impression made by it on the mind of the Evangelist. But it is worthy of note that in all these passages nothing is said either about the end or the endlessness of this severe suffering. The curtain is lifted for a moment several times, revealing a vision of anguish; but we have no indication of its duration.

An equally terrible description, from the lips of Christ, of the future punishment of sin is given in Mark ix. 43-48. It is no casual allusion, but a most solemn threefold delineation of the fate of the lost, supporting a most startling threefold exhortation. After announcing the reward of those who perform even the least service for His disciples, our Lord threatens terrible punishment for those who lead them astray. He then turns to his hearers, and

three times bids them make the greatest earthly sacrifices, even to surrender hand or foot or eye, rather than to "go away to Gehenna." This last word, Christ at once expounds by the addition, "to the fire unquenchable." In the second warning we have simply the phrase, "cast into Gehenna." In the third, we have the same phrase with the remarkable addition, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." These added words are evidently parallel to the words, "fire unquenchable," in the first warning.

This remarkable phrase, which occurs in the New Testament only here, recalls at once the closing words of the prophecy of Isaiah. The prophet sees a new heaven and a new earth. And in that new world, from month to month and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh will come to worship before God. Yet, amid that glory, the glorified ones will go forth and behold the corpses of those who have sinned. Manifestly, therefore, not all men will share that final glory. For the visible corpses of the rebellious ones proclaim the doom of the spirits which in those bodies once sinned against God. This dark shadow falling so terribly across the bright vision, Isaiah deepens by saying that "their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched." The undying worm suggests the continuance of the awful spectacle. For, if there were no corpses to feed upon, the worm would die. And if there were no fuel the fire would be extinguished. In this last sense the Greek word here used by the LXX. is found in Matthew xxv. 8, where the foolish maidens say that for want of oil their lamps *are going out*: *σβέννυται*. For these sinners there is, therefore, no rescue: else the worm would die for lack of food, and the fire be extinguished through lack of fuel.

The plain reference of this passage to the new heaven and earth, when the old things have passed away, proves that the fire and worm are metaphorical. And this is

placed beyond doubt by the impossibility of the same corpse being consumed by fire and by worms. Moreover, the trees and chaff and tares are manifestly metaphorical. So must be the fire which destroys them. In other words, the passages before us do not in the least degree imply or suggest that the wicked will be punished by material fire.

The prophet adds that the lost ones "shall be an abhorrence to all flesh;" *i.e.* to the worshippers who in verse 23 are so described. The word *abhorrence* occurs again in a similar context in Daniel xii. 2: "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to eternal life, and some to shame and eternal abhorrence."

The collocation of fire and worm is found also in Judith xvi. 17: "The Lord Almighty will take vengeance on them in the day of judgment, putting fire and worms into their flesh; they shall feel them, and wail for ever." The "fire and worms" here are evidently instruments of suffering. So Ecclesiasticus vii. 17: "The vengeance of the ungodly is fire and worm." These passages suggest that this combined metaphor was not uncommon among the Jews to describe the future punishment of sin.

These words of Isaiah our Lord adds to the terrible picture in Mark ix. 48 as a description of Gehenna. Indisputably the reference is the same in both places. And in each place the words suggest a continuance of punishment. Whether they were designed to suggest pain, like that caused by a worm preying on a living body, we cannot say with certainty. But this is evidently the suggestion in Judith xvi. 17. And we have seen that fire conveys irresistibly the idea of intense suffering. Perhaps the Saviour's chief aim was to recall, in support of His own teaching, the ancient prophecy of Isaiah.

In Matthew v. 25 the lost are said to be cast into a prison from which they will not escape till they have paid the last farthing. But these words add nothing to the results

already gained. They contain no indication whether or not the debt will some day be paid and the prison door opened, but merely assert that, until the debt is paid, the prison will remain closed.

In Matthew xii. 32 we read, "Whoever may speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come." But it is utterly unsafe to infer from this negative assertion that for some sins there is forgiveness beyond the grave. On the other hand, it reveals to us sin unforgiven throughout the age of ages to be introduced by the great day, an age extending to the farthest limit of human thought. It thus confirms much other teaching in the New Testament that the sentence of that day will be final.

The word *tormentors* in Matthew xviii. 34 will be discussed in our next paper.

In Matthew xxv. 41 our Lord foretells that in the great day He will say to those on His left hand, "Depart, ye cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." And in verse 46 He announces the fulfilment of this awful curse: "These shall go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to life eternal." Evidently, "eternal punishment" is an equivalent to "eternal fire."

The Greek word here used and its cognate verb are used by classical writers for the pruning of trees, the cutting away of anything superfluous, and the restraining of what would otherwise go beyond bounds. They are also used not unfrequently in the sense of punishment. Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, bk. i. 10, distinguishes the word *κολάζω* used here from *τιμωρέω* used in Acts xxii. 5, xxvi. 11, by saying that the former is punishment for the good of him who suffers it, the latter for the satisfaction of him who inflicts it. But, that this distinction is not universal, even in classical Greek, we learn from Euripides, *Helen*, l. 1172, where we read of punishment by death, *θανάτῳ τοὺς κακοὺς*

κολάζομεν, which could not be remedial. The same word is used in Acts iv. 21: "They let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them." And certainly the idea of the moral benefit of punishment was very far from the thought of those who were unable to punish the Apostles. The same word is found elsewhere in the New Testament only in 2 Peter ii. 9, 1 John iv. 18. The verb and substantive occur sixteen times in the Book of Wisdom, and three times in the Books of Maccabees. But not once in the LXX. or in the New Testament does the context suggest the idea of remedial punishment, or anything beyond the penalty of wrong-doing.

The punishment awaiting those condemned at the Great Assize is in Matthew xxv. 46 said to be *eternal*. This last word denotes, as we have already seen, duration extending to the limit of the speaker's mental vision. As used by Christ, it suggests that even the piercing eye of the Incarnate Son saw no limit to the punishment which in that day He will inflict. And that immediately afterwards the same adjective is by Him thought worthy to describe the life awaiting the righteous, which must be absolutely endless, adds definiteness to the word when used by Christ to describe the fate of the lost.

It may be asked whether *punishment* necessarily involves actual suffering, and therefore consciousness. So large a proportion of punishment involves suffering, that the word at once suggests this idea. But there are forms of punishment which are merely a deprivation of good, apart from actual suffering. Indeed a child who, instead of going to an entertainment, is put to bed and goes to sleep, may be said to be undergoing punishment even while asleep. For, had he not misconducted himself, he would have been awake and in pleasure. Taken by itself, it seems to me that the word *punishment* does not imply consciousness, and that *eternal punishment* does not necessarily involve endless suffering.

But these solemn words of Christ do not stand alone. A lurid light is cast upon them by other words of the Great Teacher. The eternal punishment in verse 46 is evidently equivalent to "the eternal fire" in verse 41. And, as we have seen, the word *fire* was apparently chosen by Christ to convey the idea of acute suffering. If the punishment be fire, it must be suffering; and the punishment is here said to be eternal.

In Mark xiv. 21, our Lord says of Judas, "It were good for him if that man had not been born." But if, after ages of suffering, the traitor were at last admitted into the endless and infinite blessedness of the saved, that blessedness would be worth having, even at the cost of the terrible suffering preceding it. It would, in the light of eternity, in which light Christ ever spoke, be better for him to be born, and cast into the lake of fire, and then pass into eternal life, rather than never to have existed. These solemn words, at the most solemn crisis of the life of Christ, seem to me to be little or nothing less than an assertion that Judas will never enter the rest of heaven.

The Synoptist Gospels have added materially to our reproduction of the teaching of the New Testament about the future punishment of sin. Already from the Epistles of Paul and from the Fourth Gospel we had learnt that the fate of the lost will be ruin utter and final. And St. Paul, by teaching that punishment will be in proportion to sins committed, and consequently capable of increase, had implied that the punishment inflicted in the great day will not be immediate annihilation, which would be alike to all, but a graduated punishment, involving at least a temporary consciousness. This slight indication of conscious suffering beyond the last judgment has now received terrible confirmation. The door of the eternal prison has been in a measure opened by the hand of Christ, and through it we have heard a voice of wailing and gnashing of teeth. And

the metaphor of fire, already used by Christ as His words are recorded in the Fourth Gospel, has received an extension which can be explained only as intended to convey the idea of acute suffering. The wailing is not expressly said to be endless; but we find no suggestion whatever of escape from it. And the fire is twice said to be eternal. A casual remark of Christ recorded in the Second Gospel implies most clearly that Judas will never enter heaven; and this one case involves the possibility that others also may be finally lost. It thus confirms the express teaching of Paul already adduced.

It may be objected that the above exposition contradicts both the infinite mercy of God and the moral sense of man, and that against these a mere grammatical investigation of the meaning of words has no authority. This objection introduces considerations which I have no wish to ignore. But my chief purpose in these papers is to reproduce, in the dry light of grammar and exegesis, the sense which the writers of the New Testament intended to convey on this solemn subject. And this must be, to all who believe in the historic Christ, an all-important factor of the case. To justify the results of this inquiry at the bar of the moral sense is in great part beyond the scope of these papers, and beyond the writer's ability. But when our exposition is complete, we will for a moment look at the results gained, in the light of the moral sense of man and of the character of God.

The Book of Acts does not add materially to the teaching of the rest of the New Testament on the great subject before us.

In another paper I hope to discuss the teaching of the Epistles of Peter and Jude and of the Book of Revelation.

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