

Eternity!

by J.C. Ryle

Our future state in eternity depends entirely on what we are in the present, and we must live in accordance with the Bible's teachings to avoid eternal punishment.

Scripture: Matthew 25:46, Romans 2:6, 2 Corinthians 4:18

Topics: "Eternity", "Salvation"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the profound and solemn nature of eternity, urging listeners to recognize the temporary nature of earthly life and the eternal consequences of their choices. He warns against living solely for the present, reminding that both the joys of the saved and the sorrows of the lost are everlasting. Ryle stresses the importance of grounding our understanding of eternity in Scripture, as it reveals God's character and the reality of judgment. He encourages believers to seek Christ for hope and salvation, asserting that our current state directly influences our eternal destiny. Ultimately, Ryle calls for self-examination and a commitment to live in light of eternity.

Transcript

"What is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

(2 Corinthians 4:18)

A subject stands out on the face of this text which is one of the most solemn and heart searching in the Bible. That subject is eternity.

The subject is one of which the wisest man can only take in a little at a time. We have no eyes to see it fully, and no mind to grasp it; and yet we must not refuse to consider it. There is a depth of stars in the heavens above us, which the most powerful telescope cannot pierce; yet it is well worth it to look into them and learn something, even if we cannot learn everything. There are heights and depths about the subject of eternity which mortal man can never comprehend; but God has spoken of it, and we have no right to turn away from it completely.

The subject is one, which we must never approach without the Bible in our hands. The moment we depart from "God's written Word," in considering eternity and the future state of man, we are then likely to fall into error. In examining points like these we must have nothing to do with preconceived notions as to what God's character is like, and what we think God ought to be, or ought to do with man after death. We only

have to find out what is written. What does the Scripture say? What does the Lord say? It is foolish to tell us that we ought to have "noble thoughts about God," independent of, and over and above, Scripture. The noblest thoughts about God, which we have a right to hold, are the thoughts that He has been pleased to reveal to us in His "written Word."

I ask for the attention of everyone, into whose hands this paper may fall, while I offer a few thoughts about eternity. As a mortal man, I deeply feel my own insufficiency to handle this subject. But I pray that God the Holy Spirit, whose strength is made perfect in weakness, may bless the words I speak, and make them seeds of eternal life in many minds.

I. The first thought that I bring to your attention is this: We live in a world where all things are temporary and passing away.

Surely, a man must be blind who cannot realize this. Everything around us is decaying, dying, and coming to an end. There is a sense, no doubt, in which "matter" is eternal. Once created, it will never entirely cease to exist. But in a popular practical sense, everything about us is dying except our souls. No wonder the poet says:

"Change and decay all around me I see:

O You who does not change, abide with me!"

We are all going, going, going, whether eminent or unimportant, gentle or cruel, rich or poor, old or young. We are all going and will soon be gone.

Beauty is only temporary. Sarah was once the fairest of women, and the admiration of the Court of Egypt; yet a day came when even Abraham, her husband, said, "Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead." (Genesis 23:4) Strength of the body is only temporary. David was once a mighty man of valor, the slayer of the lion and the bear, and the champion of Israel against Goliath; yet a day came when even David had to be nursed and ministered to in his old age like a child. Wisdom and power of the brain are only temporary. Solomon was once a marvel of knowledge, and all the kings of the earth came to hear his wisdom, yet even Solomon in his latter days played the fool, and allowed his wives to "turn his heart after their gods." (1 Kings 11:2)

Humbling and painful as these truths may sound, it is good for all of us to realize them and take them to heart. The houses we live in, the homes we love, the riches we accumulate, the professions we follow, the plans we formulate, the relations we enter into--they are only for a time. "What is seen is temporary." "This world in its present form is passing away." (2 Corinthians 4:18; 1 Corinthians 7:31)

The thought is one that ought to awaken everyone who is living only for this world. If his conscience is not completely seared, it should stir in him a great searching of his heart. Oh, be careful what you are doing! Awake to see things in their true light before it is too late. The things you live for now are all temporary and passing away. The pleasures, the amusements, the recreations, the profits, the earthly callings, which now absorb all your heart and drink up your entire mind, will soon be over. They are poor fleeting things that cannot last. Oh, do not love them too much; do not hold on to them too tightly; do not make them your idols! You cannot keep them, and you must leave them. Seek first the kingdom of God, and then everything else will be given to you. "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." Oh, you that love the world, get wisdom! Never, never forget that it is written, "The world and its desires pass away, but

the man who does the will of God lives forever." (Colossians 3:2; 1 John 2:17)

The same thought ought to cheer and comfort every true Christian. Your trials, crosses, and conflicts are all temporary. They will soon come to an end; and even now they are working for you "an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." (2 Corinthians 4:17) Receive them patiently; bear them quietly; look upward, forward, onward, and far beyond them. Fight your daily fight under a steadfast conviction that it is only for a little while, and that rest is not far off. Carry your daily cross always remembering that "what is seen is temporary." The cross will soon be exchanged for a crown, and you will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God.

II. The second thought that I bring to your attention is this: We are all moving towards a world where everything is eternal.

That great unseen state of existence, which lies beyond the grave, is forever. Whether it is happy or miserable, whether it is a condition of joy or sorrow, we know that in one respect it will be utterly unlike anything in this world--it will be forever. There will be no change and decay, no end, no goodbye, no mornings and evening, no alteration, and no annihilation. Whatever there is beyond the tomb, when the last trumpet has sounded, and the dead are raised, we know it will be endless, everlasting, and eternal. "What is unseen is eternal."

We cannot fully realize this condition. The contrast between now and then, between this world and the next, is so very great that our feeble minds cannot grasp it all. How we live our lives in this world brings consequences in the next, that are so tremendous, that they almost take away our breath, and we shrink back from looking at them. But when the Bible speaks plainly we have no right to turn away from a subject, and with the Bible in our hands we will do well to look at the "unseen things that are eternal."

Let us settle it then in our minds, for one thing, that the future happiness of those who are saved is eternal. However little we may understand it, it is something that will have no end: it will never cease, never grow old, never decay, and never die. "God will fill us with joy in His presence, with eternal pleasures at His right hand." (Psalm 16:11) Once they arrive in paradise, the saints of God will never ever leave that wonderful place. Their inheritance "can never perish, spoil or fade." They will "receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." (1 Peter 1:4; 5:4) Their warfare is finished; their fight is over; their work is done. "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst." They are travelling on towards an "eternal glory that far outweighs" all their struggles; towards a home which will never be broken up, a meeting without a parting, a family gathering without a separation, a day without night. Faith will be swallowed up in sight, and hope in certainty. They will see as they have been seen, and know as they have been known, and "be with the Lord forever." I am not surprised that the apostle Paul adds, "Encourage each other with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:17, 18)

For another thing, let us settle it in our minds, that the future misery of the unbelievers who are lost is eternal. I am aware that this is an awful truth, and flesh and blood naturally shrink from the contemplation of it. But I am one of those who believe it is clearly revealed in Scripture, and I dare not keep it back in the pulpit. To my eyes eternal future happiness and eternal future misery appear to stand side by side. I fail to see how you can distinguish the duration of one from the duration of the other. If the joy of the believer is forever, then the sorrow of the unbeliever is also forever. If heaven is eternal, likewise so is hell. It may be my ignorance, but I do not know how the conclusion can be avoided.

I cannot reconcile the concept of a "non-eternal" punishment with the language of the Bible. Its advocates talk loudly about love and kindness, and say that it does not harmonize with the merciful and compassionate character of God. But what does the Scripture say? Who ever spoke such loving and merciful words as our Lord Jesus Christ? Yet His are the lips which three times over describe the consequence of refusing to repent of sin, as "the worm that does not die, and the fire that is not quenched." He is the Person who speaks in one sentence of the wicked going away to "eternal punishment," and the righteous to "eternal life." (Mark 9:43-48; Matthew 25:46) Who does not remember the Apostle Paul's words about love? Yet he is the very Apostle who says, the wicked "will be punished with everlasting destruction." (2 Thessalonians 1:9) Who does not know the spirit of love that runs through all John's Gospel and Epistles? Yet the beloved Apostle is the very writer in the New Testament who dwells most strongly, in the book of Revelation, on the reality and eternity of future agony. What will we say to all these things? Will we be wiser than that which is written? Will we admit the dangerous principle that words in Scripture do not mean what they appear to mean? Is it not far better to put our hands over our mouths and say, "Whatever God has written must be true." "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments." (Revelation 16:7)

I cannot reconcile the "non-eternal" punishment with the language of our church's own prayer book. The very first petition in our matchless Litany contains this sentence, "From everlasting damnation, good Lord, deliver us." The Catechism teaches every child who learns it, that whenever we repeat the Lord's Prayer we desire our Heavenly Father to "keep us from our spiritual enemy and from everlasting death." Even in our Burial Service that we pray at the graveside, "Deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death." Once more I ask, "What will we say to these things?" Shall our congregations be taught that even when people live and die in sin we may hope for their happiness after death? Surely the common sense of many of our worshippers would reply, that if this is the case then Prayer-book words mean nothing at all.

I lay no claim to any unusual knowledge of Scripture. I daily feel that I am no more infallible than the Bishop of Rome. But I must speak according to the light that God has given to me; and I do not think I would be doing my duty if I did not raise a warning voice on this subject, and try to put Christians on their guard. Six thousand years ago sin entered into the world by the devil's daring lie--"You will not surely die." (Genesis 3:4) At the end of six thousand years the great enemy of mankind is still using his old weapon, and trying to persuade men that they may live and die in sin, and yet at some distant time in the future they will finally be saved. Let us not be ignorant of his schemes. Let us walk steadily in the old paths. Let us hold on tight to the old truth, and believe that just as the happiness of the saved is eternal, so also is the misery of the lost.

"There is nothing that Satan desires more than that we should believe that he does not exist, and that there is no such a place as hell, and no such things as eternal torments. He whispers all this into our ears, and he rejoices when he hears a layman, and much more when he hears a clergyman, deny these things, for then he hopes to make them and others his victims." - Wordsworth's Sermons on Future Rewards and Punishments, p. 36.

(a) Let us be faithful because of the truths revealed in Christianity.

What was the use of God's Son becoming incarnate, agonizing in Gethsemane, and dying on the cross to make atonement, if men can ultimately be saved without believing on Him? Where is the slightest proof that saving faith in Christ's blood can ever be achieved after death? Where is the need of the Holy Spirit, if sinners are can enter heaven without conversion and renewal of heart? Where can we find the smallest

evidence that after a person dies in an unregenerate state, that later he can still be born again, and have a new heart? If a man, without faith in Christ or sanctification of the Spirit, can escape eternal punishment, then sin is no longer an infinite evil and there was no need for Christ making atonement.

(b) Let us be faithful because of holiness and morality.

I can imagine nothing so pleasant to our flesh and blood as the deceptive theory that we may live in sin, and yet escape eternal damnation; and that although we are "enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures" while we are here, we will somehow all eventually get to heaven! Just tell the young man who "squandered his wealth in wild living" that heaven is available even for those who live and die in sin, and he is never likely to turn from it. Why should he repent and take up the cross, if he can get eventually get to heaven without repenting?

(c) Finally, let us be faithful because of the common hopes of all God's saints.

Let us distinctly understand that every blow struck at eternal punishment is an equally heavy blow at the eternity of heaven's bliss. It is impossible to separate the two things. No ingenious theological definition can divide them. They stand or fall together. The same language is used, the same figures of speech are employed, when the Bible speaks about either condition. Every attack on the duration of hell is also an attack on the duration of heaven. It is true that if we take away the fear of hell from sinners, then we also have taken away our own hope.

I turn from this part of my subject with a deep sense of its painfulness. I strongly agree with Robert McCheyne, that "it is a hard subject to handle lovingly." But I turn from it with an equally deep conviction that if we believe the Bible, then we must never give up anything that it contains. Dear Jesus, deliver us from hard, austere, and unmerciful theology! If men are not saved it is because they "refuse to come to Christ." (John 5:40) But we must not be wise above that which is written. No morbid love of liberality, so called, must induce us to reject anything that God has revealed about eternity. Men sometimes talk exclusively about God's mercy and love and compassion, as if He had no other attributes, and leave out His holiness and His purity, His justice and His unchangeableness, and His hatred of sin. Let us beware of falling into this delusion. It is a growing evil in these last days. Low and inadequate views of the absolute vileness and filthiness of sin, and of the indescribable purity of the eternal God, are fertile sources of error about man's future state. Let us think about the mighty Being whom we are subject to, as He Himself declared His character to Moses saying, "And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin." But let us not forget the solemn clause that concludes the sentence: "Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished." (Exodus 34:6, 7) Unrepented sin is an eternal evil, and can never cease to be sin; and the One we are subject to is an eternal God.

The words of Psalm 145 are strikingly beautiful: "The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made. The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. The LORD is righteous in all His ways and loving toward all He has made. The LORD is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth. The LORD watches over all who love Him." Nothing can exceed the mercifulness of this language! But what a striking fact it is that the passage goes on to add the following solemn conclusion, "But all the wicked He will destroy." (Psalm 145:8-20)

III. The third thought that I bring to your attention is this: Our future state in the unseen world of eternity depends entirely on what we are in the present.

The life that we live on the earth is short and soon gone. "We finish our years with a moan."--"What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." (Psalm 90:9; James 4:14) The life that is before us when we leave this world is an endless eternity, a sea without a bottom, and an ocean without a shore. "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." (2 Peter 3:8) In that world there will be no more time. But short as our life is here, and endless as it will be in eternity, the life we now live will have a tremendous impact on eternity. Our lot after death depends, humanly speaking, on what we are while we are alive. It is written, God "will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, He will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." (Romans 2:6-8)

We must never forget, that every one of us, while we live, are in a state of probation. We are constantly sowing seeds that will spring up and bear fruit, every day and every hour in our lives. There are eternal consequences resulting from all our thoughts and words and actions, of which we pay too little attention to. "Men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken." (Matthew 12:36) Our thoughts are all numbered; our actions are weighed. No wonder that Paul says, "The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life." (Galatians 6:8) In a word, what we sow in life we will reap after death, and reap throughout all eternity.

There is no greater delusion than the common idea that it is possible to live wickedly, and yet rise again gloriously--to be without Christ in this world, and yet to be a saint in the next. When that great preacher George Whitefield revived the doctrine of conversion, in the last century, it is reported that one of his listeners came to him after a sermon and said, "It is all quite true, sir. I hope I will be converted and born again one day, but not till after I am dead." I fear there are many like him. I fear the false doctrine of the Roman Catholic purgatory has many secret friends even within the confines of the true Church today! However carelessly men may go on while they live, they secretly cling to the hope that they will be found among the saints when they die. They seem to embrace the idea that there is some cleansing, purifying effect produced by death, and that, whatever they may be in this life, they will be found "suitable for the inheritance of the saints" in the life to come. But it is all a delusion.

"The Scripture never represents the state of future misery, as a state of cleansing and purification, or anything analogous to a state of trial, where men may conform and qualify themselves for some better state of existence: but always as a state of retribution, punishment, and righteous vengeance, in which God's justice (a perfection of which some men seem to render no account) vindicates the power of His majesty, His government, and His love, by punishing those who have despised them."--Horbery, volume II, p. 183.

"Life is the time to serve the Lord,

The time to insure the great reward."

The Bible clearly teaches that what we are when we die, whether converted or unconverted, whether believers or unbelievers, whether godly or ungodly, so we will be when we rise again at the sound of the last trumpet. There is no repentance in the grave: there is no conversion after the last breath is drawn.

Now is the time to believe in Christ, and to lay hold of eternal life. Now is the time to turn from darkness to light, and to make our calling and election sure. The night comes when no man can work. As the tree falls, there it will lie. If we leave this world refusing to repent and believe, we will rise in the same condition on resurrection morning, and find it would have been "better for us if we had never been born."

"This life is the time of our preparation for our future state. Our souls will continue forever what we make them in this world. Such a taste and disposition of mind as a man carries with him out of this life, he will retain in the next. It is absolutely true that heaven perfects those holy and virtuous dispositions, which are begun here; but the other world alters no man as to his main state. He that is filthy will be filthy still; and he that is unrighteous will be unrighteous still."

-Tillotson's Sermon on Philippians 3:20. (See Horbery, volume II, p. 133)

I strongly advise readers of this paper to remember this, and to make a good use of their time. Regard it as the stuff of which life is made, and never waste it or throw it away. Your hours and days and weeks and months and years all have something to say to your eternal condition beyond the grave. What you sow in this life on earth you are sure to reap in a life to come. As that holy preacher Richard Baxter says, it is "now or never." Whatever we do in religion must be done now.

Remember this in your use of all the means of grace, from the least to the greatest. Never be careless about them. They are given to be your helps toward an eternal world, and not one of them ought to be thoughtlessly treated or lightly and irreverently handled. Your daily prayers and Bible-reading, your weekly behavior on the Lord's day, your manner of going through public worship--everyone of these things are important. Use them all as one who remembers eternity.

Keep it foremost in your mind, whenever you are tempted to do evil. When sinners entice you, and say, "It is only a little sin." When Satan whispers in your heart, "Never mind: what is the great harm in it? Everybody does it,"--then look beyond time to a world unseen, and place in the face of the temptation the thought of eternity. There is a great saying by the martyred Reformer, Bishop Hooper, when someone urged him to recant before he was burned, saying, "Life is sweet and death is bitter." "True," said the good Bishop, "quite true! But eternal life is more sweet, and eternal death is more bitter."

IV. The last thought which I bring to the attention of my readers is this: The Lord Jesus Christ is the great Friend to whom we must all look to for help, both for now and eternity.

The reason why the eternal Son of God came into the world can never be declared too fully, or proclaimed too loudly. He came to give us hope and peace while we live among the "temporary things which are seen," and glory and blessedness when we go to the "eternal things, which are unseen." He came to bring "life and immortality to light," and to "free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." (2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:15) He saw our lost and bankrupt condition, and had compassion on us. And now, blessed be His name, a mortal man may pass through "temporary things" with comfort, and look forward to "eternal things" without fear.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has purchased these mighty privileges for us at the cost of His own precious blood. He became our Substitute, and bore our sins in His own body on the cross, and then rose again for our justification. "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God." "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us," that we poor sinful creatures might have pardon and justification while we live, and glory and blessedness when we die. (1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21)

And all that our Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for us He offers freely to everyone who will turn from his sins, come to Him, and believe. "I am the light of the world," He says: "whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." And the terms are as simple as the offer is free: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." "Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 8:12; Matthew 11:28; John 7:37; 6:37; Acts 16:31; John 3:16)

He that has Christ, has life. He can look around at the "temporary things," and see change and decay everywhere and yet have no fear. He has got treasure in heaven, "where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." He can look forward to the "eternal things," and feel calm and composed. His Savior has risen, and gone to prepare a place for him. When he leaves this world he will have a crown of glory, and be forever with his Lord. He can look down even into the grave, as the wisest Greeks and Romans could never do, and say, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55)

Let us all settle it firmly in our minds that the only way to pass through "what is seen" with comfort, and look forward to "what is unseen" without fear, is to have Christ for our Savior and Friend, to lay hold of Christ by faith, to become one with Christ and Christ in us, and while we live in the flesh to live the life of faith in the Son of God. (Galatians 2:20)

How vast is the difference between the state of him who has faith in Christ, and the state of him who has none! Blessed indeed is that man or woman, who can say, with truth, "I trust in Jesus: I believe." When the Roman Catholic Cardinal Beaufort lay on his deathbed, our mighty poet describes King Henry as saying, "He dies, but gives no sign [of comfort]." When John Knox, the Scotch Reformer, was drawing to his end, and unable to speak, a faithful servant asked him to give some proof that the Gospel he had preached in life gave him comfort in death, by raising his hand. He heard; and raised his hand toward heaven three times, and then departed. I say again, blessed is he that believes! He alone is rich, independent, and beyond the reach of harm. If you and I have no comfort among temporary things, and no hope for the eternal things, then it is completely our own fault. It is because we "refuse to come to Christ to have life." (John 5:40)

I leave the subject of eternity here, and pray that God may bless it to many souls. In conclusion, I offer to every

one who reads this volume some food for thought, and material for self-examination.

(1) First of all, how are you using your time?

Life is short and very uncertain. You never know what a day may bring forth. Business and pleasure, making money, and spending money, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage--all, all will soon be over and done with forever. And you, what are you doing for your immortal soul? Are you wasting time, or using it wisely? Are you preparing to meet God?

(2) Secondly, where will you be in eternity?

It is coming, coming, coming very fast upon us. You are going, going, going very fast into it. But where will you be--on the right hand or on the left, in the Day of Judgment? Are you among the lost or among the

saved? Oh, do not rest; do not rest until your soul is secured! Be prepared: leave nothing uncertain. It is a dreadful thing to die unprepared, and fall into the hands of the living God.

(3) Thirdly, do you want to be safe now and in eternity?

Then seek Christ, and believe in Him. Come to Him just as you are. Seek Him while He may be found, call on Him while He is near. There is still a throne of grace. It is not too late. Christ waits to be gracious: He invites you to come to Him. Before the door is shut and the judgment begins, repent, believe, and be saved.

(4) Lastly, do you want to be happy?

Cling to Christ and live the life of faith in Him. Remain in Him and live close to Him. Follow Him with heart and soul and mind and strength, and seek to know Him better every day. By doing so, you will have great peace while you pass through the "temporary things," and in the midst of a dying world you "will never die." (John 11:26) By doing so you will be able to look forward to "eternal things" with unfailing confidence, and to feel and "know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." (2 Corinthians 5:1)

P. S.

Since preaching the above sermon I have read Canon Farrar's volume, "Eternal Hope." I cannot agree with most of what that book contains. Anything that comes from the pen of such a renowned writer of course deserves respectful consideration. But I must honestly confess, after reading "Eternal Hope," that I see no reason to take back anything I have said in my sermon on "Eternity." I have laid down Farrar's volume with regret and dissatisfaction, unconvinced and unshaken in my opinions.

I can find nothing new in Canon Farrar's statements. He hardly says anything that has not been said before, and refuted before. To everyone who wishes to fully examine the subject of the reality and eternity of future punishment, I venture to recommend some works which are far less known than they ought to be, and which appear to me far sounder, and more Scriptural, than "Eternal Hope." These are "Horbery's Enquiry into the Scripture Doctrine of the Duration of Future Punishment," "Girdlestone's Dies Irae," the Rev. C. F. Childe's "Unsafe Anchor," and the Rev. Flavel Cook's "Righteous Judgment." "Bishop Pearson on the Creed," under the head "Resurrection," and "Hodge's Systematic Theology," vol. 3, p. 868.

The plain truth is, that there are vast difficulties bound up with the subject of the future state of the wicked, which Canon Farrar seems to me to leave untouched. The amazing mercifulness of God, and the awfulness of supposing that many around us will be lost eternally, he has handled fully and with characteristic rhetoric. No doubt the compassions of God are unspeakable. He does not "want anyone to perish." He "wants all men to be saved." His love in sending Christ into the world to die for sinners is an inexhaustible subject. But this is only one side of God's character, as we have it revealed in Scripture. His character and attributes need to be looked at completely. The infinite holiness and justice of an eternal God--His hatred of evil, manifested in Noah's flood and at Sodom, and in the destruction of the seven nations of Canaan--the unspeakable vileness and guilt of sin in God's sight--the wide gulf between natural man and his perfect Maker--the enormous spiritual change which every child of Adam must go through, if

he is to dwell forever in God's presence--and the utter absence of any implication in the Bible that this change can take place after death--everyone of these are points which seem to me partly put aside, or left alone, in Canon Farrar's volume. My mind demands satisfaction on these points before I can accept the views advocated in "Eternal Hope," and I fail to find that satisfaction in the book.

Origen, a Church Father who lived in the third century after Christ, first formally advocated the position that Canon Farrar has taken up. He boldly broached the opinion that future punishment would be only temporary; but almost all his contemporaries rejected his opinion. Bishop Wordsworth says, "The Fathers of the Church in Origen's time and in the following centuries, among whom were many to whom the original language of the New Testament was their mother tongue, and who could not be misled by translations, minutely examined the opinion and statements of Origen and agreed for the most part in rejecting and condemning them. Irenaeus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Chrysostom, Basil, Cyril of Alexandria, and others of the Eastern Church, and Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bede, and many more of the Western Church, were unanimous in teaching that the joys of the righteous and the punishments of the wicked will not be temporary, but everlasting."

"Nor was this all. The Fifth General Council, held at Constantinople under the Emperor Justinian, in 553, AD examined the tenets of Origen, and passed a synodical decree condemning of them. And for a thousand years after that time there was an unanimous acceptance in Christendom with the condemnation." (Bishop Wordsworth's "Sermons:" p. 34.)

Let me add to this statement the fact that the eternity of future punishment has been held by almost all the greatest theologians from the time of the Reformation down to the present day. It is a point on which Lutherans, Calvinists, and Arminians, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Independents have always, with a few exceptions, been of one mind. Search the writings of the most eminent and learned Reformers, search the works of the Puritans, search the few literary remains of the men who revived English Christianity in the eighteenth century, and, as a rule, you will always get one harmonious answer. Within the last few years, no doubt, the "non-eternity of future punishment" has found several zealous advocates. But up to a comparatively modern date, I unhesitatingly assert that the supporters of Canon Farrar's views have always been an extremely small minority among orthodox Christians. That fact is, at any rate, worth remembering.

As to the difficulties surrounding the old or common views of future punishment, I admit their existence, and I do not pretend to explain them. But I always expect to find many mysteries in Christianity, and I do not stumble over them. I see other difficulties in the world, which I cannot solve, and I am content to wait for their solution. What a mighty theologian has called, "The mystery of God, the great mystery in His allowing wickedness and confusion to prevail,"--the origin of evil--the permission of cruelty, oppression, poverty, and disease--the allowance of sickness and death of infants before they know good from evil--the eternal doom of the heathen who never heard the Gospel--the times of ignorance which God had purposely overlooked--the condition of China, India, and Central Africa, for the last 1800 years--all these things are to my mind great knots which I am unable to untie, and depths which I am unable to fathom. But I wait for light, and I have no doubt everything will be made plain. I rest in the thought that I am a poor ignorant mortal, and that God is a Being of infinite wisdom, and is doing everything right. "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25) It is a wise statement by Butler: "Every thing that appears to be unjust and cruel in the providence of God, will be understood and clarified, if we would keep in mind that every merciful allowance will be made, and no more will be required of any one, than what might have been expected of him from the circumstances in which he was placed, and not what might have been

expected from him had he been placed in other circumstances." ("Analogy," part 2, chap. 6, p. 425, Wilson's edition.) It is a great saying of Elihu, in the Book of Job, "The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in His justice and great righteousness, He does not oppress." (Job 37:23)

It may be perfectly true that many Roman Catholic theologians, and even some Protestants, have made extravagant and offensive statements about the bodily sufferings of the lost in another world. It may be true that those who believe in eternal punishment have occasionally misunderstood or mistranslated texts, and have pressed figurative language too far. But it is hardly fair to make Christianity responsible for the mistakes of its advocates. It is an old saying that "Christian errors are unbeliever's arguments." Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Milton, Thomas Boston, and Jonathan Edwards were not inspired and infallible, and I decline to be answerable for all they may have written about the physical torments of the lost. But after every allowance, admission, and deduction, there remains, in my humble opinion, a mass of Scriptural evidence in support of the doctrine of eternal punishment, which can never be explained away, and which no revision or new translation of the English Bible will ever overthrow. It is undeniable that there are degrees of misery as well as degrees of glory in the future state, and that the eternal sufferings of some that are lost and will be far worse than that of others. But that the punishment of the wicked will ever have an end, or that length of time alone will change a heart, or that the Holy Spirit continues to work for the salvation of the dead, or that there is any purging, purifying process beyond the grave, by which the wicked, in the fires of hell, will eventually be saved and transferred to heaven, these are positions which I maintain are utterly impossible to prove by Scripture. Rather, there are texts of Scripture which teach an utterly different doctrine. "It is surprising," says Horbery, "that if hell is such a state of purification, that it should always be represented in Scripture as a place of punishment." (Vol. 2, p. 223) "Nothing" says Girdlestone, "but clear statements of Scripture could justify us in believing, or preaching to ungodly men, the doctrine of repentance after death; and not one clear statement on this subject is to be found." ("Dies Irae," p. 269) Once we begin to invent doctrines, which we cannot prove by the Bible, or refuse the evidence of texts in Scripture because they lead us to conclusions we do not like, then we may as well throw away our Bibles.

The favorite argument of some, that no religious doctrine can be true which is rejected by the "common opinion" and popular feeling of mankind--that any texts which contradict this common popular feeling must be wrongly interpreted--and that, therefore, eternal punishment cannot be true, because the inward feeling of the multitude revolts against it--this argument appears to me most dangerous and unsound. It is dangerous, because it strikes a direct blow at the authority of Scripture as the only rule of faith. What good is the Bible, if the "common opinion" of mortal man carries more weight than the declarations of God's Word? It is unsound, because it ignores the great fundamental principle of Christianity--that man is a fallen creature, with a corrupt heart and understanding, and that in spiritual things his judgment is worthless. There is a veil over our hearts, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him." (1 Corinthians 2:14) To say, in the face of such a text, that any doctrine, which the majority of men dislike, such as eternal punishment, must therefore be untrue, is simply absurd! The "common opinion" is more likely to be wrong than right!

After all, there is great doubt as to what the "common feeling" or opinion of the majority of mankind is when it comes to the duration of future punishment. Of course we have no means of ascertaining it: and it would signify little either way. In such a matter the only point is, What does the Scripture say? But I have a strong suspicion, if the world could be polled, that we would find that the majority of mankind believed in eternal punishment! There is little dispute about the opinion of the Greeks and Romans on eternal

punishment. If anything is clearly taught in the stories of their mythology it is the endless nature of the sufferings of the wicked. Butler says, "Gentile writers, both moralist and poetic, speak of the future punishment of the wicked, both as to duration and degree, in a like manner of expression and description as the Scripture does." ("Analogy," part 1, chap. 2, p. 218) The strange and weird legends of Tantalus, Sisyphus, Ixion, Prometheus, and the Danaides, all have one common feature about them--in each case the punishment is eternal! This is a fact worth noticing. Therefore, the opponents of eternal punishment should not talk too confidently about the "common opinion of mankind."

As to the doctrine of the Annihilation of the Wicked, to which many adhere, it appears to me so utterly irreconcilable with the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "those who have done evil [rise] to be condemned," and "the worm does not die, and the fire that is not quenched," and also Paul's words about "the resurrection of the wicked" (John 5:29; Mark 9:43-48; Acts 24:15). Until those words can be removed from the pages of inspired Scripture it seems to me a mere waste of time to argue about it.

The favorite argument of the advocates of this doctrine, that "death, dying, perishing, destruction," and the like, are phrases which can only mean "cessation of existence," is so ridiculously weak that it is scarcely worth noticing. Every Bible reader knows that God said to Adam, concerning the forbidden fruit, "When you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:17) But every Christian knows that Adam did not "cease to exist," when he broke the commandment. He died spiritually, but he did not cease to exist! Peter also says of the flood: "By these waters the world of that time was deluged and destroyed." (2 Peter 3:6) Yet, though temporarily drowned, it certainly did not cease to be; and when the water was dried up Noah lived on the earth again.

It only remains for me now to add one last word, by way of information. Those who care to investigate the meaning of the words "eternal" and "everlasting," as used in Scripture, will find the subject fully and exhaustively considered in Girdlestone's "Old Testament Synonyms," chap. 30, p. 495; and in the same writer's "Dies Irae," chap. 10 and 11, p. 128.

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