

# Future Punishment and the Bible

by Samuel Logan Brengle

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*Samuel Logan Brengle's sermon explores the biblical doctrine of future punishment, emphasizing the eternal consequences of sin and the necessity of repentance through Christ.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 25:46, Luke 16:23, Romans 8:2

**Topics:** "Eternal Punishment", "The Atonement"

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## Description

Samuel Logan Brengle emphasizes the biblical doctrine of future punishment, arguing that every sinner must either be pardoned or punished. He warns against modern beliefs that downplay the reality of Hell and eternal punishment, asserting that the Bible clearly teaches conscious suffering for the wicked after death. Brengle highlights the importance of the Atonement, which offers salvation to those who repent and believe in Christ, while also making it clear that refusal to accept this gift leads to eternal separation from God. He stresses that the choice between holiness and sin ultimately determines one's eternal fate, and that God's justice is evident in the consequences of sin. The sermon serves as a call to recognize the seriousness of sin and the urgency of accepting God's grace before it is too late.

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## Transcript

Joseph Cook, one of America's soundest and clearest thinkers, said to me a generation ago, 'Let the Churches banish from their pulpits the preaching of Hell for a hundred years, and it will come back again, for the doctrine is in the Bible, and in the nature of things.' And he said in his great lecture on the 'Final Permanence of Moral Character': 'The laws by which we attain supreme bliss are the laws by which we descend to supreme woe. In the ladder up and the ladder down in the universe, the rungs are in the same side pieces. The self-propagating power of sin and the self-propagating power of Holiness are one law. The law of judicial blindness is one with that law by which the pure in heart see God.'

There is but one law that can save me from 'the law of sin and death,' that is 'the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.' If I refuse to submit to that law, I abide eternally under the law of sin and death and endure eternally its dread penalties.

'Every sinner must be either pardoned or punished.'

I once heard these words uttered by The Army Founder in the midst of an impassioned appeal to men to make their peace with God; and they have remained in my memory, always representing a tremendous truth from which we can never get away.

The Atonement opens wide the door of pardon, of uttermost Salvation, and of bliss eternal to every penitent sinner who will believe on Christ and follow Him, while it sweeps away every excuse from the impenitent sinner who will not trust and obey Him.

The Atonement justifies God in all His ways with sinful men.

The holiest beings in the universe can never feel that God is indifferent to sin, when He pardons a believing sinner, lifts up his drooping head and introduces him to the glories and blessedness of Heaven, because Christ has died for him. On the other hand, the sinner who is lost and banished to outer darkness, cannot blame God nor charge Him with indifference to his misery, since Christ, by tasting death for him, flung wide open the gateway of escape. That he definitely refused to enter in will be clear in his memory for ever, and will leave him without excuse.

We do not often encounter now the old-fashioned Universalist, who believed that all men, whether righteous or wicked, enter into a state of blessedness the moment they die. But others, with errors even more dangerous, because seemingly made agreeable to natural reason and to man's inborn sense of justice, have come to take his place and weaken men's faith in the tremendous penalties of God's holy law; in fact, there seems to be a widespread and growing tendency to doubt the existence of Hell and the endless punishment of the wicked.

A theory often advanced is the annihilation, or extermination, of the wicked. It is said that there is no eternal Hell; and that the wicked do not enter into a state of punishment after death, but are immediately or eventually blotted out of existence.

Then there is the doctrine of 'eternal hope.' This asserts that the wicked will be punished after death, possibly for ages, but that in the end they will all be restored to the favor of God and the bliss of the holy. The words of our Lord to the traitor appear to be an unanswerable refutation of this doctrine. If all are to be saved at last, would Jesus have said of Judas, 'It had been good for that man if he had not been born '? For what are ages of suffering when compared to the blessedness and rapture of those who finally see God's face in peace and enjoy His favor to all eternity?

There is something so awful about the old doctrine of endless punishment, and such a seeming show of fairness about these new doctrines, that the latter appeal very strongly to the human heart, and enlist on their behalf all the sympathies and powerful impulses of 'the carnal mind' which is enmity against God,' and which is 'not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.'

In forming our opinions on this subject we should stick to the Bible. All we know about the future state is what God has revealed and left on record in 'the law and ..... the testimony,' and 'if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.' Human reason, as well as human experience fails us here, and we can put no confidence in the so-called revelations of spiritualism nor in the dreams of sects who pretend to be able to probe the secrets of eternity. If the Bible does not settle the question for us, it cannot be settled.

The Bible teaches that there is punishment for the wicked after death, and that of this punishment they are conscious. In the record of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus says: 'The rich man also died,..... and in Hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said,..... Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.'

Some labor hard to strip this Scripture of its evident meaning and to rob it of its point and power, by declaring that it is only a parable. On the contrary, the Saviour's statements are given as facts. But even though we admit the account to be a parable, what then? A parable teaches either what is or what may be, and in that case these words lose none of their force, but stand out as a bold word-picture of the terrible doom of the wicked.

Over and over Jesus speaks of the wicked being cast into 'outer darkness,' where 'there shall be weeping' and 'wailing and gnashing of teeth.' Three times in one chapter He speaks of the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched.

Paul says, 'Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish,' shall come upon the wicked. And John, in the Revelation, says they are in torment.'

What can all this mean but conscious punishment?

Let a man who never before saw the Bible, read these words for the first time, and he would at once declare that the Bible teaches the conscious suffering of the wicked after death. He might not believe the teaching, but he would never think of denying that such was the teaching of the Bible.

The punishment mentioned in the Bible must be felt, must be conscious, otherwise it is not 'torment,' 'tribulation and anguish.' The 'second death,' the death of the soul, must be something other than the destruction of its conscious existence.

Jesus has defined for us eternal life as the knowledge of God: 'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.' (John xvii. 3.) If then this blessed knowledge constitutes eternal life, what is the death which sin imposes but just the absence of this knowledge, with consequent wretchedness and misery? To lose God, to sink into outer darkness, to lose all fellowship with pure and loving souls, to be an outcast for ever, this is 'the second death,' this is 'torment and anguish,' this is 'Hell,' and this is 'the wages of sin.'

The Bible further teaches that the punishment of the wicked after death will be endless.

There are distinguished teachers and preachers who have declared that the Bible does not teach the eternity of sin and of punishment. But if we examine for ourselves, we find this teaching as clear as human language can make it. In the Revised Version we read: 'Whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin,' and eternal sin will surely be followed by eternal woe. While sin lasts misery lasts.

The strongest terms that can be used have been used to teach eternal punishment. When we say a thing will last for ever we have put it strongly, but when we duplicate the phrase and say it will last for ever and for ever, we cannot add to its strength -- we have said all that can be said. This is just what the Bible does in speaking of the punishment of the wicked.

The phrase 'for ever and ever' is the strongest term by which the idea of eternity is expressed in the Bible. It is the phrase used to express the eternal life and glory of the righteous: 'And they shall reign for ever and ever.' Paul used these words when he prayed for the continuance of God's glory: 'To whom be glory for ever and ever.' (Galatians i. 5; see also Philippians iv. 20; 2 Timothy iv. 18; Hebrews xiii. 21.) It is also the very phrase used to assert the eternal existence of God Himself -- Who 'liveth for ever and ever.' (Revelation iv. 9, 10; x. 6; xv. 7.)

This phrase, which is used to declare the endless life and glory of the righteous and the existence of God Himself, is also used to declare the endless punishment of Satan: 'The Devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.' (Revelation xx. 10.) In verse 15 we are told that the wicked are to share the punishment of the Devil himself. And Jesus, in foretelling the sentence of the wicked at the Judgment Day, declares: 'Then shall He also say to them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels'; thus showing that the wicked are to share the punishment of the Devil, which is 'for ever and ever.'

Did not Jesus mean to teach endless punishment when, three times in six short verses, He warned His hearers in the most solemn manner to cut off hands and feet and pluck out eyes, rather than to go into Hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched? (Mark ix. 43- 48.)

Is not endless punishment implied in the parable of the cruel and unforgiving servant, who, owing ten thousand talents (or one million eight hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds), with nothing with which to pay, was delivered to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due? Does not Jesus mean to teach that his debt was beyond his power to cancel; and that, since he proved wickedly unworthy of mercy and forgiveness, he was buried for ever beneath the burden and torment of his vast debt? And this parable but pictures the moral and spiritual debt of the sinner -- illimitable and ever increasing, unless, in penitence and obedient faith, he finds release through the Blood of Christ before the final sentence of judgment is passed and the prison gates have closed upon him.

We learn from Josephus, the Jewish historian, that the Jews believed in endless punishment; and when the Son of God came into the world to teach men the truth, He did not deny and combat that belief, but spoke fearfully plain words which would confirm and strengthen it.

Well does one writer say: 'They who deny that any of the words used of future punishment in Holy Scripture express eternity, would do well to consider whether there is any way in which Almighty God could have expressed it, which they would have accepted as meaning it.'

God did not trifle when He inspired those dreadful warnings. Take heed, then, that you do not trifle when you read them, but rather fear and tremble at the Word of the Lord. For just in proportion as you, in the secret of your own heart, doubt the endless punishment of the wicked, in that proportion you will lose power to resist sin and desire to save your own soul or that of others around you.

Two powerful motives which the Holy Ghost uses to lead men to accept the Saviour and renounce all sin, are the hope of everlasting blessedness and the fear of eternal woe. These motives may, in time, in the heart of a Christian be swallowed up in a higher motive of love and loyalty to God, but they always remain as a frame work. No preacher through all the ages has appealed so simply, so constantly, so powerfully, and with such even balance to these motives as did the Saviour. The whole of Matthew xxv. is an illustration of His method of appeal.

Eternity furnishes these motives. They balance each other like the two wings of a bird, the two wheels of a carriage, right and left, upper and lower, right and wrong, and this balance is never lost, but evenly held throughout the Bible from the blessing and cursing of Deuteronomy (xxx. 19) to the final fixedness of moral character as 'filthy or 'holy' in Revelation (xxii. 11). Deny one of them and your strength against sin is gone. You may live a life most beautiful in its outward morality, but those secret girdings of the will which in

the past impelled you to resist sin unto death, will weaken, and you will find yourself making secret compromises with sin. You will lose your power to discern 'the exceeding sinfulness of sin.' You will be ensnared by Satan as 'an angel of light,' and some day you will become 'a servant of sin.'

The sinner is not alarmed by the thought that death ends all. He will say, 'Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.' It is not death he fears, but that which follows death. Nor does he care for punishment after death if he can only believe it will end sometime he will still harden himself in sin and mock God. But preach to him the faithful Word of God, until the awful fact of endless punishment, set over against the endless blessedness of God's approval and favor, pierces his guilty conscience and takes possession of his soul, and he will go mournfully all his days until he finds Jesus the Saviour.

Such has always been the effect of the doctrine when proclaimed in power and pity and love with the fire-touched lips of holy men and women. But let men in their folly imagine themselves wiser and more pitiful and just than God, and so begin to tone down this doctrine, then conviction for sin ceases, the instantaneous and powerful conversion of souls is laughed at, the supernatural element in religion is called fanaticism, the Holy Ghost is forgotten, and the work of God comes to a standstill.

But some one objects that God is not just to punish a man for ever for the sins he commits in the short period of a lifetime. And thus speaking he thinks of certain acts of sin such as lying, cheating, swearing, murder, or adultery. But it is not for these sins that men are sent to Hell. God has pardoned multitudes who were guilty of all these sins, and has taken them home to Heaven. All men are sent to Hell by the weight and pull of their self-chosen evil and discordant nature and character, because they will not repent and turn from sin to God, but choose to remain filled with unbelief, which begets pride and self-will; consequently they are out of harmony with, and are in antagonism to God and all His humble, obedient servants; they will not come to Jesus, that they may be saved from sin and receive a new heart and life. They are dead in trespasses and sins, and they refuse the Life-Giver. Jesus says: 'Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life.' Again He says: 'This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.'

If sinners would come to Christ and receive the gracious, loving life He offers, and allow Him to rule over them, God would not impute their trespasses to them, but would forgive all their iniquities, and their sins would drop off as the autumn leaves from the trees in the field.

But men will not come. They refuse the Saviour; they will not hear His voice; they turn away from His words; they remain indifferent to His entreaties; they laugh or mock at His warnings; they walk in disobedience and rebellion; they trample on His holy commandments; they choose darkness instead of light; they prefer sin to holiness, their own way to God's way; they resist the Holy Spirit: they neglect and reject Christ crucified for them -- and for this they are punished.

All this stubborn resistance to God's invitations and purposes may be linked to a life of external correctness and even apparent religiousness. Not until all His judgments and warnings, His entreaties and dying love have failed to lead sinners to repentance and acceptance of the Saviour, and not until they have utterly refused the eternal blessedness of the holy, does God cease to strive with sinners and to follow them with tender mercies.

By obstinate persistence in sin men come to hate the thing that God loves, and to love the thing that God hates; thus they become as dead to God's will, to holiness, and to His plans for them, as the child destroyed by smallpox or diphtheria is dead to the hopes and plans of its mourning father and mother. And

as such parents in sorrow put away the pestilence-breeding body of their dead child, so God puts sinners, in their utter spiritual corruption, away from His holy presence 'and from the glory of His power.'

How could God more fully show His estimate of sin, together with His love and pity and longing desire to save the sinner, than by dying for sinful man?

God in Christ Jesus has done that. Bless His holy name! But the sinner tramples on Christ's Blood, rejects His infinite mercy, resists His infinite love, and so hardens himself into an eternal sinner; hence he deserves eternal punishment, which will follow sin as surely as night follows day.

Is sin only a mild infirmity that we need not fear, and that will yield to gentle reproof? Was the Son of God only playing at being a Saviour when He came down and died for us? Or is sin an awful crime against God and all His creatures, that can only be remitted by the shedding of blood? Is it a crime for which men are responsible, and of which they ought to repent? Is it a crime that tends to perpetuate itself by hardening men in evil, and that culminates in eternal guilt when men finally resist the Holy Ghost, and totally and for ever turn from Jesus the Crucified, rejecting Him as their Saviour and Lord?

If sin is such a crime -- and the Bible teaches that it is -- then God, as moral Governor of the universe, having provided a perfect way, and having done all He could to persuade men to turn from sin, is under obligation, if He meets only with determined resistance, to place sinners under sentence of punishment, to oppose them and put them away for evermore from His holy presence, and from the society of holy men and angels, where they can no more breed moral and spiritual pestilence, nor disturb the moral harmony of God's government and people. And when God does so my conscience takes God's part against my sensibilities, against my own soul, and against a guilty world, and pronounces Him just and holy.

We live in a stern universe where fire will not only bless us but burn us; where water will both refresh and drown us; where gravitation will either protect or destroy us; we must not look at things sentimentally. If we love God and serve Him all things will work for our good; but if we despise or neglect Him we shall find all things working for our eternal undoing and misery. God does not send people to Hell who are fit for Heaven. The standard of fitness is made plain in the Bible, and God's tender and pitying love has provided for every sinner pardon for past sins through the death of Jesus, and purity, power, and abundant help for the present and future through the gift of the Holy Spirit; so that there will be excuse for none. If one whom I love commits some terrible crime, violating all the righteous and gracious laws that safeguard society, and consequently is cast into prison, my sorrow -- if I myself am the right kind of a man -- will spring not from the fact that he is in prison, but rather from the fact that his character makes him unfit to be out of prison; and if he should go to Hell, my sorrow would be due, not to the fact that he was in Hell, but rather to the fact that he so neglected and despised infinite love and mercy that he was unfit for Heaven. Such a person would possibly be more unhappy in Heaven than in Hell, just as a man who has terribly inflamed eyes is more unhappy in the light of broad day than in the darkness of midnight.

Finally, for a man to say, 'I believe in Heaven, but I do not believe in Hell,' is much as though he should say, 'I believe in mountains, but not in valleys; in heights, but not in depths.'

We cannot have mountains without valleys, we cannot have heights without depths, and we cannot have moral and spiritual heights without the awful possibility of moral and spiritual depths; and the depths are always equal to the heights. The high mountains are set over against the deep seas, and so Heaven is set over against Hell. If Heaven is topless, Hell is bottomless.

Every road leads two ways. The road which leads from New York to Boston also leads from Boston to New York. A man can go either way as he chooses; so with the roadway of life. The man who chooses the things God chooses, loves the things God loves, and hates the things God hates, and who, with obedient faith, takes up his cross and follows Jesus, will go to the heights of God's holiness and happiness and Heaven; but the man who goes the other way will land in the dark, bottomless abysses of Hell. Every man chooses his own way.

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide, In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side; Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight, Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right, And the choice goes by for ever 'twixt that darkness and that light.

Joseph Cook closed his address, at the Chicago 'Parliament of Religions,' on 'The Certainties of Religion,' with these words, 'I bought a book full of the songs of aggressive evangelical religion, and I found in this little book words which may be bitter indeed when eaten, but which, when fully assimilated, will be sweet as honey. I summarize my whole scheme of religion in these words, which you may put on my tombstone

Choose I must, and soon must choose,

Holiness, or Heaven lose.

If what Heaven loves I hate,

Shut for me is Heaven's gate.

Endless sin means endless woe,

Into endless sin I go,

If my soul from reason rent

Takes from sin its final bent

As the stream its channel grooves,

And within that channel moves;

So does habit's deepest tide

Groove its bed and there abide. Light obeyed increaseth light;

Light resisted bringeth night.

Who shall give me will to choose,

If the love of light I lose?

Speed, my soul, this instant yield,

Let the light its sceptre wield

While thy God prolongs His grace,

Haste thee to His holy face.

'HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE, IF WE NEGLECT SO GREAT SALVATION?'

'WHATSOEVER A MAN SOWETH, THAT SHALL HE ALSO REAP.'

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