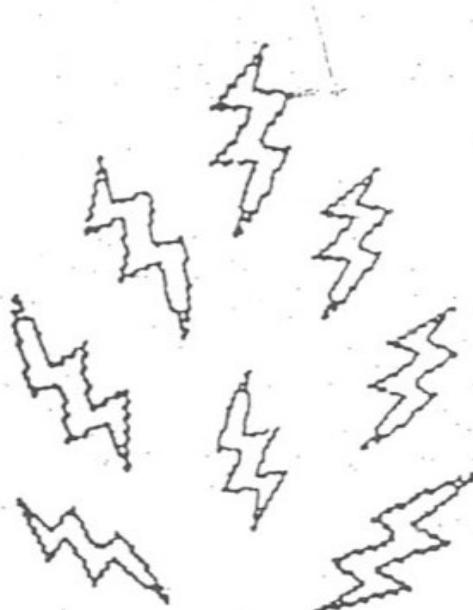


PUNISHMENT
OF
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Much has been written on the subject of the punishment of the wicked after death. The well known idea of an eternal torment for the sinner is common knowledge to all. Yet, one thing has been overlooked in promising the wicked eternal punishment by torture, and that is to be eternally tormented the sinner must have eternal life. To promise the sinner life eternal is contrary to the Scriptures, and is plainly condemned, as it is written:

"With lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life." (Ezek. 13:22)

Contrary to the usual teaching, the Lord tells us that, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 6:23) "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) "This is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (I John 5:11-12) "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:36)

In all these passages just quoted, the Lord is speaking of eternal life, and not the common life that we now enjoy, thus proving to us that the only way to obtain eternal life is to accept it as a gift from God through Jesus Christ, and on the plan of salvation as outlined in the Bible. To fail to accept Christ Jesus as our ransom, means that we must pay the

penalty for our sins. Christ paid the debt for all the sins of the world upon the cross, and to receive the merits of that sacrifice we must come to God through him. When we let our sins go before to judgment to be blotted out by the blood of Christ, and then live the Overcoming life thereafter, our past sins are settled, and we are justified. (Rom. 8:1) Eternal life is then given unto the believer who will enter into that more abundant life in the resurrection morning.

However, if we continue in our transgressions and die in our iniquities, our sins will stand against us in the judgment, and we will have to pay the penalty ourselves, which will be the second death. If the wages of sin is eternal torment, as some teach, then it would have taken eternal torment to pay the penalty. If only one person has accepted the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ, then our Lord would have been obliged to suffer torment eternally to keep the God of heaven satisfied. This eternal torment theory is not a Bible doctrine, and God is not a fiend, as some believe, but is love.

The Resurrection and the Reward

The popular teaching of professed Christian ministers is that the soul of the wicked is cast into a burning hell just as soon as the last breath leaves the mortal body. This, however, clearly contradicts Holy Writ, for the Scriptures teach that "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." (II Peter 2:9) In that day, "there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust." (Acts 24:15) Then, "He will judge the quick (living) and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom." (II Tim. 4:1)

Having faith in this promise, we may rest secure in our belief that "He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the

world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." (Acts 17:31) Thus we learn from these Scriptures that there is to be a resurrection of both the justified and unjust dead in a general day of judgment, and the wicked will receive their punishment at that time, and the righteous rewarded by eternal life through Christ.

At that day, and not before, "the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth much more the wicked and the sinner." (Prov. 11:31) The righteous shall not inherit heaven, neither shall the wicked inherit life everlasting in a burning hell. Both theories are absurd, as well as unscriptural.

As to what the rewards for the righteous shall be, the Lord has not left us in darkness; for the Scriptures teach that the wicked shall go away unto everlasting punishment: but the righteous unto life eternal. (Matt. 25:46) The everlasting punishment is II Thess. 1:9, destruction is death.

If the language has not changed its meaning, Paul taught destruction, and not banishment; but, "A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this. When the wicked spring as grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed forever." (Ps. 92:6-7)

The Holy Scriptures harmonize throughout, teaching the destruction of the wicked in the second death: "A smoke is driven away, so drive them away, as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God." (Ps. 68:2) "Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more." (Ps. 104:35)

In the day of judgment God will "make an utter end affliction shall not rise up the second time. For while they be drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." (Nahum 1:9-10) "And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed." (Isa. 1:28) "The wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs; they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away." (Ps. 37:20, 38)

Let us notice the end of the wicked of the nations who followed the deceiver, Satan, and sought to capture the city of God: "They went up on the breadth of the earth and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city; and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them." (Rev. 20:9)

This destruction by fire is the common lot of all transgressors against God. "The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." (Rev. 21:8)

"...The day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch ... They shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts." (Mal. 4:1-3)

Everlasting and Unquenchable Fire

In the parable of Jesus, found in Mark 9:43-48, the punishment of the wicked is brought to our view. To the believers of eternal torment this is a description of an eternal torture for the evil doers; but to those who study the parable and give heed to its teaching, the Gehenna parable does not teach everlasting torture, but the very opposite - eternal extinction.

The admonition reads: "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for the to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

In this Scripture, the word translated hell, is taken from the Greek word "Gehenna." It is the Grecian mode of spelling the Hebrew words which are translated, "The valley of Hinnom." Into this place were cast all kinds of filth, with the carcasses of beasts, and the unburied bodies of criminals who had been executed. Continual fires were kept to consume these. Here children were also burned to death in sacrifice to Moloch. Gehenna, then, as occurring in the New Testament, symbolizes death and utter destruction, but in no place signifies a place of eternal torment.

We have proof then that this valley near Jerusalem was the crematory for the city. Into this valley were cast the refuse and garbage of the city, and along with it the bodies of dead animals, and criminals, who were not given burials. A continual fire was kept burning in this valley and it consumed the material which was fed to it. That part of the refuse, or flesh that did not reach the flames, was destroyed by the worms that fed upon it.

To those whom Jesus was warning, this place called Gehenna was an ideal picture of complete and utter destruction by fire. No better illustration could have been brought before their eyes, then a condition of which they were well acquainted, hence Jesus taught with the Gehenna parable. This valley of Hinnom is also called Tophet in the Scriptures, and ever pictures a place of destruction, and never of eternal torment. It certainly pictures the consuming lake of fire into which the wicked shall be cast and destroyed at the end of the age. (See Isaiah 30:33) This Scripture is in exact harmony with all others, and teaches that the wages of sin is death.

Some may assert that there can be no everlasting or unquenchable fire, if the wicked cease to exist, for the fire must be fed by the tormented sinners. However, the Bible is a book of harmony, and does not contradict its testimony of the eternal fire that is unquenchable. That it teaches an everlasting fire, we do not deny, for Jesus taught it in the parable just examined. Neither do we deny that the punishment of the wicked is to be forever; for in Matt. 25:46, Jesus said: "These (the unrighteous) shall be put away into everlasting punishment (which is everlasting death) (See verse 41), but the righteous into life eternal." II Thess. 1:7-9 says, "And to you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty

angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance upon them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Here the everlasting punishment of the wicked is declared to be everlasting destruction.

To believe that there is an everlasting fire does not obligate us to teach that there are to be sinners tormented in the unquenchable flame, worlds without end. But to be unquenchable is proof that there are no sinners who will escape the destruction awaiting them in this fire. It will not cease, therefore, there will be none of the sinners who will escape its punishment.

It is admitted by all Christians that there is an everlasting God. Paul says that "Our God is a consuming fire." (Heb. 12:29) Therefore, God is an everlasting, consuming fire; one that does not preserve the wicked, but destroys. "With righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His truth, and with the fire of His lips shall He slay the wicked." (Isa. 11:4) "For Tophet (also Gehenna) is ordained of it, yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it." (Isa. 30:33)

Since the Lord is "from everlasting to everlasting," and His breath is "like a stream of brimstone," and with it shall he "slay the wicked;" it is evident truth there is no one who is able to quench the breath of the Lord.

Since the Scripture does not teach that the unquenchable fire will preserve the wicked throughout the ages for an eternal torment, let us examine the passages that explain the accomplishments of this everlasting fire.

John the Baptist proclaimed, concerning Jesus, "He will burn up the chaff (wicked) with unquenchable fire." (Matt. 3:12) Isaiah said, "With the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." (Isa. 11:4) Hence, we understand that when the wicked are slain by the breath of the Lord they are burned up as chaff. When chaff is consumed it is destroyed in its original form and becomes smoke which ascends into the atmosphere and never returns to form the object which was burned. In like manner shall the wicked be consumed. The unquenchable fire shall leave neither root nor branch; they shall all be turned into ashes and smoke forever, according to Mal. 4:1; Psa. 37:20.

"Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." (Jude 7) "The same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." (Luke 17:29-30) When "Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord: and he looked toward Sodom and toward all the land of the plain, and behold, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace." (Gen. 19:27-28)

There is no one, whom we know of, who believes that the smoke of Sodom and Gomorrah has ever returned, and never will; hence, has ascended up forever and ever. Likewise, the

wicked at the end of the age, will be destroyed with eternal and unquenchable fire from God out of heaven. Their smoke will ascend forever and ever, but the Word does not say that the wicked shall be tormented forever and ever, as many teach. (Mal. 4:1-4; Psa. 37:20; Rev. 14:11)

The Bible says, "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 forever and ever." (Rev. 20:10)

From this verse we learn that it is the devil who is tormented, and not the wicked. The sinner was devoured with the fire from heaven previous to the torment of the devil. (See verse 9)

Some teach that this Scripture is proof that the devil is to remain with us throughout eternity, because the verse reads, "shall be tormented day and night forever and ever." We must admit that he is to be tormented as long as night and day exist for that is just what the Word says. Yet, from the Bible we learn that day and night are to cease in the future.

Note the following: "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light." (Isa. 60:19-20) There shall be no ~~light~~^{night} there; . . . they need no candle, neither ~~light~~ of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light." (Rev. 22:5; 21:25) And from Job we learn that God "hath compassed the waters with bounds, until day and night come to an end." (Job 26:10) Thus the scripture is harmony in its teaching that night and

day shall eventually cease, and at that time shall the torment of the devil cease, for he will be destroyed at that time, as the apostle Paul tells us, saying: (Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he (Jesus) also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” (Heb. 2:14)

Thus we learn from the Holy Word, all evil is to be stamped out, the devil is to be destroyed, and his followers consumed, before the kingdom of God is inaugurated in the earth made new. “The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: WHICH IS THE SECOND DEATH.” (Rev. 21:8)

Then shall the “tabernacle of God” be “with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain (hence, no torment); for the former things are passed away.” (Rev. 21:3-4)

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