

Conditional Immortality

Its Relation to Christian Doctrine and to Final Retribution

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“The thief cometh not, but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy: I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly” (John 10:10, Revised Version). This text plainly asserts that it is the grand purpose of our Savior's ministry to bring eternal life to a race exposed to death and destruction. The subject of Conditional Immortality is a question of great moment; it touches the serious matter of human destiny and bears on the whole system of Christian doctrine. It is larger than any denominational limits, concerns all people, and is arising for consideration in all Christendom. It is well first of all to have a statement of terms. By Conditional Immortality we mean immortality to be attained on conditions of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and conformation to his will and character by spiritual contact with him, as opposed to the doctrine of inborn and compulsory immortality of all souls regardless of faith or character.

Let us also observe that this doctrine is not chiefly, of itself, either a negative teaching as to non-immortality of men or a declaration of the nature of punishment, but first of all, and supremely, it is a clear, positive doctrine of life, eternal life offered to a dying world by the mercy of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Though because of current views of the nature of man and the recompense of the finally sinful, the negative and punitive phases of this truth must at times be pressed till they almost shadow the main question, yet let it be urged by us and noted by all, as essentially and chiefly a doctrine of glorious redemptive grace in Christ our Savior.

I. What is the relation of this view of immortality to Christian doctrine or teaching – to biblical teaching, specially, if you please?

1. Its relation to the silence of the Bible upon the native and necessary immortality of all men.

The so-called philosophic hope of a future life is, by the pleasure of its advocates, grounded upon this latter hypothesis. All their teaching centers in it; much is said of it in their theology and hymnology; it echoes from pulpit and pew; it is the natural language of such a faith. But concerning this the Bible is silent! The word “man” or “men” occurs over two thousand eight hundred times, and many things are said about man, but he is never said to be immortal. If this were true in the thought of the Holy Spirit, or in the faith of the Bible writers, it would seem that for stress of truth, or from natural aptness to speak one’s faith, it would have once at least escaped the restraints of silence, and found record in the book of truth; but not so. The late Rev. John H. Pettingell, in his large work, *Life Everlasting*, quotes Dr. G. D. Boardman as admitting this fact in these words: “And yet – for I would be candid – I must add that not a single passage from Genesis to Revelation, teaches, so far as I am aware, the doctrine of man’s immortality” (*Life Everlasting*, p. 14).

Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Petavel, in his great work, *The Problem of Immortality*, quotes the learned and noted Delitzsch as saying: “There is nothing in all the Bible which implies a native immortality” (p. 89). He also quotes Olshausen as saying: “The doctrine of the immortality of the soul is not to be found in the Bible, nor even its name” (*Ibid.*).

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown in their commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:53 say, “Nowhere is the immortality of the soul, distinct from the body, taught: a notion which many erroneously have derived from heathen philosophy” (*Pocket Commentary on Corinthians*, p. 191). All Bible students must know this. Why is it so? There can hardly be a reason unless simply that it is not true. With what courage its advocates go on their way without the companionship of a single biblical text! “Like the existence and eternity of God, taken for granted,” some have said – but the existence and eternity of God is not taken for granted – rather, it is stated, argued and urged in many striking passages. This futile effort to escape the significance of admitted Bible silence only involves the case more deeply.

2. The relation of Conditional Immortality to the biblical teaching of man’s mortality. The Bible is not silent on this side of the case. It speaks by word and act. A transaction at the gateway of human history startlingly indicates this truth. From the garden of God’s own planting, the man of God’s own making is driven out because of sin, and the reason of the sad expulsion is in the record. The man who was doomed to death must not eat of the “tree of life” and become immortal. Here God took good care that man, without redemption, should not receive power to “live forever.” It is a prophecy for all time. Sin and immortality are things that God hath not “joined together.”

Positive expressions of man’s mortality frequently occur. A Psalmist, singing of man’s “best estate,” fails to speak of his immortality, but rather declares that he is

“altogether vanity” (Psalm 39:5). Again, “Man is like to vanity” (Psalm 144:4). The Psalmist, Isaiah, Peter and James all unite in saying that man is like to the grass of the field, and all his glory like the flower thereof. James adds that man is like to “vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away.” More than this, the word “man” or “men” occurs in the Old Testament over five hundred times as the rendering of a word whose meaning, and that of its corresponding Greek, is “a mortal.” (See Young’s Concordance, Dr. Adam Clarke on Job 4:17, and Liddell & Scott.) It is very strange that this fact has been wholly veiled in the common versions of the Scriptures, when, if it had appeared, many a passage would be more luminous. “Put them in fear, O Lord: let the nations know themselves to be but men [only mortals]” (Psalm 9:20). Why, in this world of death and dying, cumbered with many signs of our mortality, should we be, or need to be, so much more instructed in man’s mortality, than his immortality, if the latter is also true?

3. The relation of Conditional Immortality to principles of interpretation.

Principles of exposition are very important, as they determine our understanding of God, govern our relations to man, to time and to eternity. Whatever depends, in our life and experience, upon our thought of God, our understanding of his word, or the character of our religious faith and thinking, centers in the principles of interpretation which we consciously or unconsciously follow.

If the Bible is really intended to be a revelation, it would seem that the primary, obvious, literal sense of its words should have first rank and highest probability; that this must specially be so in case of the great legal and sacrificial terms of the Bible. We know what these words meant in the law and its sacrifices, in the penalties of the law, and in the life and death of Christ – indeed, everywhere except concerning man’s nature and destiny. Why should they not have the same meaning here as everywhere else? It seems to me there is real wisdom and evident truth in the saying of John Locke, the noted philosopher, that, “a law requires the plainest and directest words.”

If this is true where only earthly courts and mortal life are concerned, how much more so should it be true in the Gospel of eternal redemption, and the threatenings of endless ruin! To teach that the Bible does not mean what its words naturally convey on such weighty questions is to rob it of half its power, not only with common people but with legal and scientific minds who are in no wise accustomed to strange religious and mystical senses of words. We must give up all hope of any natural, literal interpretation of the Bible if we abandon it with reference to the words “life” and “death.” These are the great words of the law, of atonement, of redemption and of destiny. These words are the very backbone of revelation. To justify a departure from the primary, obvious sense of these words, there must be great reason and most conclusive evidence. Our friends who hold the native immortality of the soul at once accept and reject this rule of interpretation; their philosophy has muddled their science (?) of exposition.

Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Petavel very aptly says: “It will at once be seen that in this theory the word “death” is employed in two contradictory senses. When it relates to the body, it designates the cessation of life; but when predicated of the soul, it bears the contradictory signification of the perpetuation of life” (*Problem of Immortality*, p. 14). We may add that so it is with the words “life,” and “immortality,” for when they speak thus of their own notion of the soul, they mean the literal life and being of the soul, but when they expound Christ’s promise and gift of eternal life to believers, then it is not literal life and being, but only well-being (happiness) – a metaphorical sense! They are sure to hold to the strong, obvious sense of life as to their own theory, but not at all as to the teaching of the Gospel. Let it be reversed! Make your own theory and philosophy as mystical and metaphorical as you please, but spare the mighty promises of Christ and the Bible! Let it stand in all its strong, fundamental significance as a promise of life and immortality! Beloved, the whole system of mystical interpretation is occasioned by this human notion of native immortality. We protest. We cry, “Save the Book, and let the notion die!”

Let me quote again from Dr. Petavel: “There are in Greek, as well as in French and English, plenty of words to express ‘happiness.’ In French we have counted more than a dozen, and Greek is no less rich. There are even more words to express the notion of ‘misery,’ to convey which the term ‘death’ is supposed to be used. Human languages are only too fertile in vocables expressive of the idea of ‘suffering.’ Death and life, on the contrary, are without synonyms; a further reason for leaving to these terms their proper meaning, which no other expression can convey without paraphrase. Strong in the principle which furnishes a basis for Protestantism and biblical philology, we take our stand upon the literal meaning as in a citadel” (*Problem of Immortality*, pp. 118-119).

4. The relation of Conditional Immortality to the object of divine incarnation. The mission and work of the Son of God, as the “Word made flesh,” is the most marvelous phase of the marvelous plan of salvation. If we question the purpose of the Father’s infinite love in giving his only son, the answer is immediate and definite: “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish [be lost, ruined or destroyed] but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “Herein was the love of God manifested in us” – in our case – “that God hath sent his only begotten son into the world that we might live through him” (1 John 4:9). Or would we wish to study the incarnation from the point of the object of Christ in his own advent, then his own lips will say, as in our text: “The thief cometh not but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy; but I am come that they may have life, and may have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Amazed by the suffering and death of the sinless one, and thrilled with the thought that no death was ever like it in all the ages, we ask the purpose of this startling tragedy. The reply is at hand: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). It is not simply a scene of suffering to

secure the blessing of happiness, but of death that he might open to us the gates of life. Turning from the inception let us gaze on the consummation of the Lord's redemptive work, and we behold him in the last great conflict destroying the "last enemy," swallowing up death in victory, while rising saints put on immortality, and with joyous acclaim shout, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Here essential life is crowned victor over literal death. Thus from beginning to end the object of the divine incarnation is to abolish sin and death, and confer immortality upon those found meet for endless life.

5. The relation of Conditional Immortality to Christ's own teaching. The Lord's own words are highest authority for all true disciples; it is becoming to all Christians to settle all questions of faith face to face with Christ's own speech. When we are sitting at the Master's feet, what will he say to us in this case? That God has made him the fountain of life to those who believe on him (John 5:24-26). Surrounded by promises of life to his disciples is this great saying; "As the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself." It seems to me that the most heroic spiritualizer would pause and think the word "happiness" too meager to be put here in place of "life"! He is the "Bread of Life" to those who partake of him, and who will live because of him (John 6:48,50,53,57). Though the fathers "ate manna in the wilderness and died, he that eateth of this bread will live forever." Since it is quite evident what death the fathers suffered, it is quite clear what kind of life is promised in this great parable of life.

He is the Good Shepherd who giveth his life for (and to) the sheep who follow him (John 10:11,28). We know what kind of life he gave up on the cross, and this may indicate the quality of the life – whether metaphorical or literal – which he will impart to his own. He is the True Vine, in whom all branches that live must abide (John 15:6). Life everywhere is the basis of fruitage. The branch that is fruitless must itself perish. Not to receive such life from Christ as will be manifested in spiritual fruit bearing is to lose the right of existence itself. He also names two ways, the narrow and the broad, which lead to two destinies, and he names the destinies "life" and "destruction." To his disciples he was the great Teacher who had the "words of eternal life." He ever spake as man never did, but specially so, and for the comfort of all the ages, at the sepulcher of Lazarus, saying: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die" – literally, "not die forever" (*Englishman's Greek Concordance*). This last clause of the great saying is the negative form of the promise that in the day of Christ, all believers will receive from him eternal life. We know not but that those whom he raised when he was here died again – we do know that the believers whom he will raise up, or change, "in the last day," will not die any more. Christ is not only "resurrection," or its equivalent, but also "life" – eternal life! How strongly did Christ teach and illustrate the doctrine of a future life! How evident is this if we turn not the Gospel of life into

a mere promise of happiness. Let us, like our Lord, and in his name, offer to a hungry, dying world nothing less than bread – “The Bread of Life”!

6. The relation of Conditional Immortality to the fact that the New Testament doctrine of life is set over against the historic death of the race. In Romans 5 and 6, and 1 Corinthians 15, St. Paul gives extended treatment of the question in this light. Through the “one man,” the first Adam, came sin and death – a death reigning over all (sinners, and those not sinners according to the strict legal sense – Romans 5:14) – a universal mortality. Just as justification and sanctification are put against the sins of the ages (the sin of us all, the moral disorder and evil) – so the life and immortality in Christ is put against the literal historic death that has run through the ages. “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in the Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits; then they that are Christ’s at his coming” (1 Corinthians 15:21,23). The common pulpit and theology are so mystical in their teaching about death and the life to come, that the world goes on in its sorrow, sometimes cursing God because of misery and death, little grasping the grand truth that in the Gospel of redemption in Jesus Christ, God himself has furnished a remedy for it all, exactly answering to the need of the race, and fully adequate to meet the perils upon which we have fallen. By the very reality of sin and death we are furnished with a means of emphasizing the reality of salvation in Jesus Christ, which is but divine deliverance from sin, mortality and death into the glorious and endless life of God’s eternal kingdom.

7. The relation of Conditional Immortality to the doctrine of the atonement, as the ground of our salvation, and as the antitype of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. What would seem to be the divine purpose and teaching in that plan of multitudinous and constantly repeated sacrifices? It would seem that there must be some plain, yet momentous and profound significance in it, as well as typical reference to the Messiah’s cross, or so much slaughter and blood would be largely superfluous and inexplicable. There seems to us to be a plain and natural, yet deep and awful meaning in it all. A fitting, cumulative acknowledgement and symbolism that because of sin the life had been forfeited, that the transgressor was justly doomed to death, and that redemptive mercy could be granted only on condition of life given in behalf of lives forfeited.

The old Hebrew doctrine declares that the life of all flesh is in the blood, and hence the shedding of blood for the remission of sins indicates that the life was lost on account of sin. It was not a matter simply of pain, there was no torture; it was death, and only death. All this gives prophecy of the New Testament doctrine of salvation through the death of Christ and forgiveness through his blood.

Christ’s sinlessness gave virtue to his sacrifice, and is the example of believers; but the gospel is constant in naming his death as the ground of our salvation, and his

blood (the sacrifice of his life) as giving the right, and being the means of divine forgiveness. The doctrine of native immortality of all men may have some room for the sufferings of Christ, but it has no logical use for his death, or for the blood of his cross; while the doctrine of Conditionalism illuminates and confirms the atonement, and magnifies the sublime doctrine of the Cross. Salvation through the blood of Christ is, to many a Christian, mystical and confounding, but to the Conditionalist it is reasonable, full of profound truth, and in accord with the doctrine of redemption as it fell from the very lips of our Lord.

8. The relation of Conditional Immortality to the doctrine of regeneration. This teaching is solemnly, urgently inculcated by our Lord (John 3:3, 5, 6), and finds frequent reference in the New Testament. The Savior grounds the necessity of being “born anew” in the fact that what is “born of the flesh is flesh.” In Scripture’s light two things are quite apparent about the “flesh;” the first, that it is sinful, unspiritual (Romans 7:14, 8:3, 7); the second, that it is mortal. It is not by any mechanical means that we may pass from the carnal into the spiritual, or out of the mortal into the immortal, nor by any process of self-promoted moral evolution, but by the divine infusion of a new life, by the contact of the living Word and the life-giving Spirit with the penitent, believing soul.

This new life is here to be developed in Christian character and service, and to be crowned with the fullness of immortality in the resurrection. Thus he who hath “begun a good work” in his people will complete it in the “day of Jesus Christ.” Plainly, with double force, in this view of the case, we may urge upon sinful and dying men the Savior’s words: “Ye must be born again.”

9. The relation of Conditional Immortality to the doctrine of the resurrection. How pertinent the words from Dr. Adam Clarke in his concluding notes on 1 Corinthians 15: “One remark I cannot help making; the doctrine of the resurrection appears to have been thought of much more consequence among primitive Christians than it is now! How is this? The apostles were continually insisting on it, and exciting the followers of God to diligence, obedience and cheerfulness through it. Their successors in the present day seldom mention it. So apostles preached, and so primitive Christians believed: so we preach, and so our hearers believe. There is not a doctrine in the Gospel on which more stress is laid, and there is not a doctrine in the present system of preaching which is treated with more neglect.”

It must be perfectly apparent to any candid mind that this is painfully true at this very hour in current religious teaching. Why is this? The doctrine of soul immortality and its natural adjunct, glorification at death, leaves no need of a resurrection. Being made thus superfluous, why should it not become obsolete? – but that is the word that Christ spoke in the presence of death, the word he gave us for our hope, and it was the word of the apostles in the face of death, and I trust you are not willing to take any other. Either Christ and his apostles were mistaken, or

there is a mistake in much of current theology: which shall it be? Surely a hypothesis concerning the nature of man which naturally leads away from biblical language and doctrine seriously needs correction: not simply revision at the outer branches, but correction at the roots, in the region of causes. May such reformation be hastened!

10. The relation of Conditional Immortality to general Christian doctrine. Strongly in favor of this teaching is the fact that it harmonizes with and completes the system of evangelical doctrine. If I rightly understand the present, general faith as to election, it would seem to be conditional; holding that God's foreordination grows out of his foreknowledge, which is cognizant of character, and not exclusive of free agency.

Certainly according to all general teaching, salvation is conditioned on repentance, faith and obedience – so also is the kingdom, the inheritance, the crowns and reward of saints, while the punishment of the wicked is caused by their disobedience. Thus, in evangelical faith, all is conditional except immortality. Here the conditions vanish, for all souls are decreed immortal without regard to character or choice. Make immortality attainable on grounds of free choice, faith and holiness, and you have a completed system of Conditionalism. Then every other doctrine is made more reasonable, and there is given to all a sublime harmony. Thus harmonized, the whole system claims our reason and commands our faith.

Conditional Immortality magnifies the Savior's work, adding to his glory as the Great Redeemer. In this view he is the author not only of our blessedness or happiness, but of the fundamental, the very essential thing, life itself. We are just as much inclined to value literal life in this relation, as our friends of the other view are when they battle for the immortal life and being of the soul. This sense of the word "life" is as fundamental in their doctrine as in ours, only they would accredit it to nature, while we ascribe the glory of the gift to Christ, as did St. Paul. "The free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Thus he gives us not only the foliage and blossoms of the "Tree of Life," but the seed, root and life of it also. He not only erects the superstructure, but also lays the foundation of the great temple of redemption. As "Prince of Life," he triumphs gloriously over all the power of sin and death, victoriously and finally destroying all the works of the devil. All hail the perfected son who is "the cause of eternal life to all who obey him" (Hebrews 5:9, Syriac Version).

II. We now turn to the second part of our subject and will consider the relation of Conditional Immortality to final retribution or the punishment of the wicked.

1. There is a choice of three views: the everlasting misery and torment of the wicked, the final restoration of all souls to the favor of God and the happiness of heaven, and the destruction of the life and being of the finally sinful and impenitent. This last belief has been called "the likeliest view" by Rev. Dr. W. R. Huntington. He says, "It is one of the commonplaces of scientific reasoning that the hypothesis bringing into harmony the greatest number of ascertained facts is the one most likely to be true. So in our dealing with this obscure, but momentous problem of human destiny, that belief is certainly entitled to our best regard, which disposes of the greatest number of difficulties with the least amount of strain." Having gone over the three views carefully and reverently, he strikes a weighty balance in favor of Conditional Immortality and the extinction of sin. It is quite evident that the other views are opposing extremes, which involve difficult labor with much of Bible teaching, whereas the truth (so often found on the middle ground), here stands between them in the doctrine of destruction.

2. The Bible is silent as to any promise of immortality, or threat of eternal existence for the wicked. It never says that they must or will live forever. There is not even a hint that in the resurrection they will come forth to life eternal or put on incorruption. This fact, standing in such striking contrast to what is so freely said of the righteous, ought to have great weight in any discussion of this question. You have doubtless heard sinners told from pulpit and pew that they have immortality, will live forever in happiness or misery, but the Scriptures say neither the one nor the other. We believe that the Bible's silence calls for recognition as well as its speech. Let us beware of any thesis concerning human destiny that is not sustained by plain scripture.

3. On the other hand, there are many plain statements and impressive implications which point to the mortality and transientness of life of the ungodly. The words "destruction," "destroyed," and "perish" are used of the end of the wicked twenty-five times in plain passages of the New Testament. There are many striking figures whose force cannot easily be evaded or misconstrued. In the Old Testament, we are told that sinners will perish like chaff, be consumed like the fat of lambs, and be destroyed like burning stubble (Psalms 1:4,6, 37:20; Malachi 4:1). In the New Testament, the ungodly are also compared to chaff, and are said to be cast into unquenchable fire; they are not wheat to be preserved, but tares to be destroyed: they are of the world and are to pass away, while only he who doeth the will of God abideth forever (1 John 2:17); they sow to the flesh, and shall in the harvest day "reap corruption;" that word signifies "mortality," "decay," "destruction," and is opposed to "immortality" and "incorruption." Why are such words and similes repeatedly used of the wicked, so obviously and naturally conveying the thought of perishability, if they shall not and cannot perish? If the inspiring Spirit desired to teach the transientness and destruction of the wicked, what more suitable words could he have chosen?

4. We believe the relation of this teaching to the doctrine of eternal punishment is in every way harmonious. We hold and insist that such doctrine is taught in the Bible. I am ready to believe, so far as I know, all that Dr. Angus claims in the following words: "The following conclusions," he says, "may be regarded as established. (a) Every form of expression used in the New Testament to describe the everlastingness of the blessedness of God and of the happiness of the redeemed is used to describe the future punishment of the wicked. (b) Every form of expression (some fifteen in all) used in the Old Testament to describe the duration of the blessedness of God and of the happiness of the righteous, is used in the Old Testament to describe also the punishment of the wicked" (*Unknown Country*, p. 109).

5. Let us note that the nature of that punishment is also plainly stated in the Bible. In the Old Testament take Psalm 92:7-8: "When all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed forever: but Thou, O Lord, art on high forevermore." In the New Testament consider 2 Thessalonians 1:9: "Who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (R.V.). Do you object that eternal death (or destruction) is not eternal punishment? We reply by quoting from Prof. Charles F. Hudson, who says, "We have already shown that death, as the literal loss of life, is punishment. If this be true, then by parity of reasoning the loss of life forever is eternal punishment, and if logic could carry conviction of truth, we might add nothing more... But," he adds, "there are suffrages. We offer three names, each one as good authority as man can be for man." He names the younger Edwards, Dr. Watts and Hermann Witsius (*Debt and Grace*, pp. 418-420).

Rev. Charles H. Oliphant advocates that, "Upon grounds of interpretation, of philosophy, of analogy and of the Christian consciousness alike, it is not its endless conscious torment, but its final dissolution and cessation that is meant by the ultimate death of the soul. The question whether such a fate constitutes 'eternal punishment' depends on whether it is allowed to constitute punishment at all. If it is punishment, it is surely eternal. Great are the sufferings of such a soul, returning with its aborted spiritual perceptions and faculties toward not being, but greater is its loss. Its suffering is protracted; its loss is eternal" (Introduction to *Extinction of Evil*, pp. 33-34).

Dr. Petavel, on Matthew 25:46, concerning punishment, says, "The six dictionaries of Passow, Planche, Alexandre, Wahl, Grimm, and Liddel & Scott are unanimous in deriving the Greek word *kolasis*, chastisement, from a root signifying to break by striking, to cut off, curtail, dock, prune, mutilate, dismember; whence our word 'iconoclast,' one who breaks or destroys images. *Kolasis* therefore designates chastisement by means of deprivation. On careful consideration it will be seen that chastisement most frequently involves the idea of loss, a deprivation: a fine is a loss of money; imprisonment, loss of liberty; death, loss of life... The wicked will be

forever cut off from the trunk of humanity, their destruction will be total and final: that is eternal chastisement” (*Problem of Immortality*, p. 196). In the chapter heading he tersely puts it thus: “Punishment” is “essentially deprivation of a faculty; the supreme punishment will be the deprivation of all faculties” (*Ibid.* p. 189).

6. The relation of the view of retribution to the New Testament doctrine of “Hell.” The word “hell,” from *Gehenna*, occurs twelve times. This is the only Greek word rendered “hell” which refers to the punishment of the wicked: this is the place of fire where the wicked are cast, not as yet, but only after the judgment day. What are the facts about this word? Dr. Lyman Abbot has well said, “The figure which has entered most fully in Christian literature from Scripture as a figure of torture, certainly bears no such meaning: namely, the ‘fire that is not quenched, and the worm that dieth not.’ Outside the walls of Jerusalem, in the valley of Gehenna, was kept perpetually burning a fire, on which the offal of the city was thrown to be destroyed. This is the hell-fire of the New Testament. Christ warns his auditors that persistence in sin will make them offal to be cast out from the holy city, to be destroyed. The worm that dieth not was the worm devouring the carcasses, and is equally clearly a symbol not of torture, but of destruction” (*Unknown Country*, p. 72).

“Gehenna” had its illegitimate and its proper use. As an affront to God, and a shame to man, it was used for the abominable and infernal worship of Moloch: and, strange to say, eminent theologians seem to have derived their notions of the hell of the wicked from this fact. Yet, even in that case, death put an end to its awful tortures. We insist that the scriptural symbolism must be derived here from the legitimate, proper use of the place which occurred under divine sanction, or at least not as an outrage of divine commands. How was it used in this sense? What was cast there? Only the following, as I can learn: bodies of executed criminals, dead beasts, and the refuse and garbage of the city. Nothing was cast there to be tormented; it was simply and only a place of destruction. Christ indicates the same purpose as to the future in a most signal and solemn warning: “Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Rev. Samuel Minton, for a long time rector of Easton Chapel, London, says, “Gehenna was neither a place of penal servitude, nor a reformatory. The refuse was not kept there festering forever in its own corruption, neither was it purified: it was utterly consumed, and thereby presented a striking picture of the ultimate, entire destruction, not of the sinner’s happiness, nor yet of his sinfulness, but as our Lord distinctly specifies, of his ‘body and soul,’ the component parts of his being, ‘himself” (*Symposium in Life Everlasting*, p. 619).

7. This doctrine of punishment is confirmed by the character of the selected terms of retribution as illustrated by St. Peter’s use of the word “destruction.” Surely the

Bible's writers had a variety of words at their command; the terms used are a selection, and by their obvious meaning we may judge of the truth intended to be conveyed. Take the Revised Version and turn to St. Peter's second epistle, and notice that he speaks of "destructive heresies," "swift destruction," "destruction that slumbereth not," of those that walk after the flesh, who in their "destroying will surely be destroyed;" of the "day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men;" of God not "wishing that any should perish;" or some who "wrest the Scripture to their own destruction" (2 Peter 2:1,3,12; 3:7,9,16). In Acts 3:23, he declares that every disobedient soul will be "utterly destroyed from among the people." This is a strong word for utter ruin and extirpation. Thus we learn what will be the end of the wicked who are "kept under (sentence of) punishment unto the day of judgment." Here is a body of doctrine given in such words as to be very conclusive on this momentous question.

We find then, 1. The wicked always spoken of as mortal, perishable, transient. 2. Their end and punishment always stated in words which, in their primary, literal meaning, stand for deprivation, extinction of being, destruction. We are therefore led away from the doctrine of eternal misery, and also from the other extreme, the final restoration of all men to the favor of God, and are led to full belief in the utter extinction of sin, and of those found impenitent at the day of judgment.

This doctrine of Conditional Immortality, it seems to me, has the fewest difficulties and most advantages of any view of retribution. It does not, on the one hand, belittle free agency – which has such historic prominence in the dealings of God with men – and at a belated hour develop the thesis of compulsory salvation: neither does it, on the other hand, inflict on the character of God the appearance of cruelty in punishment, or burden his government with eternal discord and sin. It has no use for that last offspring of error, the doctrine of divine ignorance, to vindicate divine ways. The final issue is consistent with probation, history, divine grace, divine foreknowledge and divine judgment.

The outcome in such case is a clean universe and an unlimited extension and harmony of holiness and blessedness forever. As Dr. Joseph Parker observes, our Lord has "An Undivided Throne"!

Dear unsaved friend, may you, with us, by grace, escape the doom of the impenitent, and share in the blessed immortality of the redeemed, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Added Words

It is encouraging to notice how men are led into this faith; also, its recent progress.*

Rev. Emmanuel Petavel, D.D., author of the very able and learned work, *The Problem of Immortality*, tells us that a “simple lexicological observation” led him into this line of thought. When he was admitted as a student of the theological faculty of Neuchatel he was asked to preach from the text: “Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” He then thought the destruction or loss of the soul to be eternal torment, and so preached. “Yet,” he says, “it was this very text that became the starting point of my doctrinal evolution. One day in consulting Alexander’s Lexicon I noticed that the verb in the original Greek (*apolesai*) signifies primarily ‘to destroy.’ This is a ray of light. ‘To destroy’ the soul! ‘Then the soul must be perishable,’ I said to myself; and I very soon saw the whole Bible illuminated by this new light” (*Problem of Immortality*, pp. 27,38).

Rev. Joseph D. Wilson, Rector of St. John’s Reformed Episcopal Church, Chicago, Ill. (1882), accepted this view in his early ministry in Pittsburgh, Pa. In a course of Lenten sermons, given by the different rectors of the city, he preached on the wrath of God and the endless misery of the lost. His clerical brethren were distressed by it. He was puzzled that they thought it unwise to preach what they believed to be the truth. He sought light from Rev. William Preston, D.D., whom he called the “oldest and wisest clergyman of those present.” He was shocked and distressed to find Dr. Preston a believer in the destruction of the wicked, so he set about the study of the question for the purpose of converting him from such heresy. “The old error in me,” he says, “died hard, but in the face of dispassionate, painstaking investigation there was but one conclusion, viz., that the Scriptures uniformly promise life, eternal life, to those in Christ, and destruction, perdition, death to the impenitent. The more I have studied the subject, the more confident have I become that the notion of the immortality of the wicked is a pagan notion, which crept into the church along with other errors when Greek philosophy saddled itself upon Christian truth” (*Symposium in Life Everlasting*, pp. 631-632).

Rev. C. M. Butler, D.D., for many years rector of Trinity Church, Washington, D.C., and later, Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the Episcopal Divinity School, Philadelphia, Pa., during a three years’ residence in Rome, was aroused by the “medieval pictures and the great painting of the Judgment by Michelangelo, in the Sistine Chapel, and many other pictures which represented the doomed in their agony... I began anew,” he says, “a study of the New Testament, and to my immense relief I came to the distinct conclusion that death and destruction did not mean imperishable life in torment... The blessed scheme of salvation through a God-man Redeemer seemed to stand out in a light that was more glorious and tender, as well

as brighter than before. I found that the removal of this dreadful dogma was not the striking out of a stone from the complete arch of truth through which we enter into the eternal life which would weaken and deface the structure, but rather the removal of a stone of stumbling before that arch which prevented multitudes from entering in" (*Ibid.*, pp. 739-740). Dr. Petavel and Prof. Butler came into this faith by direct, independent study of the Scriptures, and not knowing that such doctrine was held by any other religious teachers or body of people in Christendom, and Mr. Wilson accepted it after most careful searching to prove it untrue. We name these believers as illustrations of how men are led into this doctrine, and doubt not that similar cases could be multiplied almost without limit. Not proselyting and special pleading, but careful, impartial study of the Bible, a thorough sifting of the great terms of redemption and destiny for their primary meanings, with a single desire and devout prayer to know the truth and only the truth, has led a host of godly souls in all churches and all lands into this most reasonable and Scriptural faith. As to its recent progress, our statement must be as brief as possible. A few facts, gleaned from many that might be given, will show that the truth has a strong footing and is rapidly advancing in many parts of the world. We may say that there are two classes of Conditionalists—one class holding that the soul or spirit consciously survives in the first death, but has no essential immortality, and unless saved through Christ will wholly perish in the second death; the other class believing in the unity of man, that the soul, or spirit, has no complete self-personality independent of the body, or power of conscious activity separate therefrom in the death state, and that the resurrection is the only gateway into Christ's presence and kingdom. The variation of view is only incidental; since, as to the main question, the dependence of all upon Christ for the gift of immortality and the utter destruction of the finally impenitent, the two classes are a unit. Rev. Edward White, some fourteen years since, in a lecture before the Artisans of London spoke concerning the extent of this faith somewhat as follows (some details being omitted): "The Bible truth of 'Life Only in Christ' and the natural mortality of man is held to my certain knowledge by the following persons, whose names are at least a counterweight to any opposite authorities: the Rev. Samuel Minton, A.C., Prebendary Constable, known as one of its ablest advocates; Dr. Richard Weymouth, Head Master of Mil-Hill School, and one of the finest Greek scholars in the country; the late Dr. Mortimer, Head Master of the City School; the Archbishop of York, Dr. Thompson. This doctrine has advocates in all our chief cities. In London it is held by Dr. Parker of City Temple, by Rev. J. B. Heard, and by not a few ministers of all denominations. In Birmingham it is taught by Dr. R. W. Dale; in Liverpool by Rev. Hugh Stowell Brown. In Cambridge it is maintained by Professor Stokes, F.R.S., Secretary to the Royal Society, who holds the Mathematical chair of Sir Isaac Newton, and is one of the foremost scientific men in Europe. In Edinburg it is held by several of the leading clergy of all the churches and by Professor Tait, perhaps the leading mathematical reasoner in Scotland. In other parts of England it is held by the Rev. Thomas David, A.M., Vicar of Roundhay, and the Rev. W. Hobson, A.M., of Douglass, two most able supporters;

by the Rev. J. Hay Aitken, the earnest Missioner; by the Rev. W. Kerr; by Professor Stevenson of Nottingham, Professor Barlow of Dublin and Professor Barrett of the Royal College of Science in Dublin; by Rev. W. Griffith of Eastbourne, Dr. Morris of Plymouth, and Mr. Maude of Holloway, several of whom have written largely on the question, and all of whom are excellent biblical scholars. It is held by the celebrated physicians, Dr. Andrew Clark and Dr. Farre, and by a long array of Christian medical men in all parts of the country... In Jamaica we have the Rev. J. Denniston, A.M., author of the work called *The Perishing Soul*. In India we have Mr. Skrefsrud, Missionary for the Santhals, and one of the greatest linguists in Asia, speaking nearly twenty languages; and the Rev. W.A. Hobbs of Calcutta, an experienced missionary who writes that it is 'astonishing how this view of divine truth commends itself to the almost instant appreciation of the unprejudiced native Christian mind. I never thrust it to the front, but nevertheless it is silently and rapidly spreading.' In Paris it is held by M. Decoppet, Pastor of the Oratoire; M. Bastide, head of the French Religious Tract Society; M. Pascal, Pasteur, H. Hollard, and Professor Sebatier, of the Protestant college, one of the foremost theological scholars of France. It is also held by three of the pastors in the Church of Lyons. In Brussels it is held and taught by M. Charles Byse, a man of wide and accurate scholarship in Oriental languages. In Germany it was held by Rothe, Nitzsch, Olshausen, Hase, Ritschl, and Twesten. It is taught by Prof. Gess of Breslau, and by Professor Schultz of Gottingen." He names eminent advocates in Switzerland, Africa and Australia, and sums up as follows: "I have recited these names of learned believers of all Protestant Churches – scholars, writers, preachers, professors of divinity, criticism, and physical science; literary men, mathematicians, barristers, journalists, missionaries; some of them of the first rank, all of them men of high education, who have carefully studied this question, under the conditions of prayerful inquiry and adequate learning; ...for a special purpose, namely to encourage general investigation, against the attempts of many persons, both clerical and lay, to suppress inquiry by the assertion that no one of any consequences agrees with us" (*Life Everlasting*, pp. 73-77). Much might be said of its advance in this country, and a host of great names be quoted, but we forbear, save to indicate the following signs of progress. In 1883 Rev. John H. Pettingell's large work, *The Life Everlasting: What is it? Whence is it? Whose is it?* was published with a symposium in which twenty strong men in Europe and America state their faith on this question. This was an excellent feature, and very significant of increasing interest. In 1887 came forth the first volumes of that great and excellent work, *Parker's People's Bible*, and in this Conditionalism finds vigorous statement, perhaps its first in any work of equal size and character. In 1889 came the notable book and great symposium, *That Unknown Country*, in which perhaps all the theories of the world on retribution are given, and Conditionalism is not wanting in the long list. It has at least five strong advocates, who give five able and learned essays in its behalf. It was thus given a standing in the creed of the world on this question. In 1892, Dr. Petavel's great work, *The Problem of Immortality*, a thoroughly fit companion for Prof. Hudson's *Debt and Grace*, was given to the

world in both French and English. This is a most learned and complete discussion of the question in all its bearings.

He must be blind who cannot see by these things that the Conditionalist faith is gloriously marching on. Brethren, let us lift up our heads, and go on our way rejoicing! The truth is spreading, and it glorifies God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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