

Luke 16:28 (Franklin Clifford Blount) 152738

Hell and Eternal Punishment, Hell and Eternal Punishment (16:28)

My subject to-night is Hell and Eternal Punishment. We shall make a large draft upon Scripture, abetting what we may say by the Word of God. It is in response to a voice from the unseen world that we speak, "Lest they ... come into this place of torment" (Luke 16:28).

An unwelcome subject, you say, but since the very thought of this possibility is so intolerable, what will the realization of it be, for you're going to change worlds before long, and it is a matter to concern you most solemnly, as to whether you are going up or down to eternity. You may well abandon yourself to its consideration, sinking for the present your interest in social, civic and political issues, as they are only for time. You may dismiss this subject tonight with a jest, and feel yourself at ease by the recent vote of that little knot of people in Washington, D. C., who dignify themselves by the name of "International Bible Students' Association," as their leader borrows prestige by posing as "Pastor of Brooklyn Tabernacle." ("Brooklyn Tabernacle" HAS BEEN KNOWN IN PRINT FOR NEARLY A HALF CENTURY, AS THE SEAT OF SOUND TEACHING AND SCRIPTURAL VIEWS.) But when you find your hours numbered, if not before, you'll want something more than the word of men like yourselves to rest upon. Every gray hair, every ache, every pain is the preliminary shaking of what's to be removed, and since there is that about you that shall outlast death—your soul, your real personality—would you not better be quite sure at this point. The past is gone, the present is going, the future abides, so the long end of your existence is before you. You may well say—

You may well be amazed at your indifference. It is the truth of Scripture, and a well known psychological fact, that conscience may slumber, but it can not die. It will assert itself at the end and in eternity, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." There will be the unrelieved gnawing of conscience then. Do not be cheated to believe that you die, so cease to exist, though the "worm" and the "fire" remain for it is "their worm" that does not die. Again and again this possibility comes before you, as Banquo's ghost, "with locks as gory as ever," and you dismiss it and take another quaff of this mixture of deceit and falsehood, brewed by the arch enemy of your soul, but held to your lips by one who, with a few skillful maneuvers with the Greek, of which you know little, or nothing, but possibly as much as your councillor, fixes your destiny, in annihilation or bliss. If not before, your vision will be cleared when there is a flutter of black from your door. Then you'll know.

In the garden, the devil said, "Ye shall not surely die." In other words, "God is too good to carry into execution His threat." But read the next chapter but one, and there you have eight times solemnly—recorded and "he died," and "he died," and "he died." Nine centuries passed, but "dying thou shalt die," had its fulfillment; and still, the tolling bell, the muffled drum, the new-made grave tell us that death is here. Man received the testimony—"Ye shall not surely die," only to find his fatal mistake when too late. This same one is not saying now, "Ye shall not surely die"—but "death is all," "death is extinction." The old lie is fearful mockery, so this new one takes its place. But is death extinction? "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). "It is appointed unto men," it is their common portion as sinners. Note those words, "after this" and tell me, will you escape the judgment of God by dying? The contrary is true. It is death that passes you on, it is only another stage in the direction of having to say to God about your sins, and the rejection of His Son. No amount of sleight and sophistry can lose to us the force of that dreadful "after this." Go to your room and read, when alone with God, "It is appointed unto men once to die but after this the judgment," and tell me, is death ceasing to exist? Is death extinction? While death dissolves our present state of existence, that existence does not cease. "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do, but fear Him which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell." (hades, not the grave, but the unseen world, never used in a good sense).

Jesus tells us in Luke 20, of those dead to us—"All live unto God." "The rich man died and was buried, and in hell he lift up his eyes being in torment." I am told this is a Jewish figure, so it is, but not a figure of extinction by death, but of "torment" "in hell" "after death," not the final state, but the immediate portion of those out of Christ upon dying, as Paradise is the immediate portion of the saved. "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise," and "paradise" stands opposed to "hell", as "fullness of joy" stands opposed to "torment." "In Thy presence is fullness of joy." You tell me this 16th-of-Luke scene was "a tradition of the Pharisees," but it would be impossible that Jesus should foist this upon us. Highly figurative, yes, but a figure can not be interpreted to mean the opposite of what it represents, so far removed from things with which we have any experience, things with which we are familiar, must be taken and adapted to these unseen things, so the use of "bosom," "eyes," "tongue," etc., but this does not relieve the passage of its burden—"hell" and "torment;" these are not figures of heaven and happiness. Hear, then, this message, not from heaven, nor from earth, but from "hell." "I am tormented in this flame." Fire, in Scripture, is a symbol of the holiness of God, applied in judgment, and loses nothing of its terrible meaning by being a symbol. But this is not all there is "a resurrection of the unjust," there is "a resurrection of judgment," not only is there the "resurrection of the just," "resurrection of life."

For the believer, the one who has become "subject to the Son" (John 3:36 JND), there will be no judgment regarding the question of sin; John 5:24 is decisive as to this, "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life." In verse 22, we have, "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment (same word rendered "condemnation" in ver. 24) unto the Son." You observe it is the One to whom all judgment is committed who speaks in verse 24, and surely the Judge ought to know, and He says, we "shall not come into judgment." While it is said, "It is appointed unto men once to die but after this the judgment," it proceeds, "So Christ was once offered (dying in our stead) to bear the sins of many;" (thus enduring for us the judgment of God), so that it may be added, "And unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, without sin, (apart from the question of sin,) unto salvation," (not judgment.) "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." We are not only not condemned, we can't be condemned, for Christ in sustaining the judgment of God on the cross, has exhausted His wrath against us, so that we are already saved, not only from sin in its past consequences, but, O, hear it "from the wrath to come," (1 Thess. 1:10). "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more," is to the point, for if these come up against us at the judgment seat, they are remembered again. Sweet to know, God not only forgives, He forgets. Glory to His Name! "Herein is love with us made perfect, that we may have boldness

in the day of judgment" (1 John 4:17). To have boldness before "the throne of grace," is precious indeed, but since "Christ has answered with His blood," we may have "boldness in the day of judgment," too. The judgment seat then, will be every whit as friendly as the mercy seat is now.

When it is said in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "We must all appear [be manifested] before the judgment seat of Christ," there is no anxiety awakened in the Apostle's heart for believers; but for "men," he has the most solemn concern "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." Believers are never designated by the term "men." They are charged with "walking as men," in 1 Corinthians 3. The judgment seat will be a thing of "terror" for those out of Christ, for those who stand there without the merit of Another, but not for those whose sins Jesus bore, when He hung on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24). When we stand before the judgment seat, it will not be to pass our trial for condemnation or acquittal, it will be a question, not of our sins, but of our works, so of suffering loss or receiving reward. Salvation and eternal life are not presented in Scripture as reward. These are ours here and now (1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Tim. 1:9; John 6:47; 10:28). Moreover not only do we possess salvation and life now, we have the knowledge of them (Luke 1:77; 1 John 5:13).

Those who build on Jesus Christ shall have their work manifested at the judgment seat, when, "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned—he shall be lost? No, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:11-15). There is no thought of Purgatory or its equivalent here. It is not the person, but the "works" that are burned. The case of Lot in Genesis 19, illustrates this. He was delivered, but when God's consuming judgment had passed, there was nothing to be seen as the result of his years of toil; he was saved "as by fire." "The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." Quantity can not make up for quality with God. But I resume.

The wicked dead will be raised, too. It is an appalling fact that you will stand before the great white throne in your entirety, spirit, soul and body, if you belong to that class spoken of as "the rest of the dead" (Rev. 20). These have no part in the "first resurrection," for those in this class are called "blessed and holy." "The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." This takes us to the threshold of the eternal state. There we find "the dead, small and great, stand before God." (The wicked dead, for the saved were contemplated in "the first resurrection" a thousand years before.)

And now, "death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them and they were judged every man according to their works, and death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." Death and hades being cast into the lake of fire signifies that there is no more death, neither state of separate spirits. Hell (hades) stands in the same relation to the soul, as grave to the body, thus you find them in conjunction. But you'll meet death again in different guise, for "once to die" is said of physical dissolution, the separation of the soul from the body. In this way you do not die again, but there is that final state of separation from God in judgment. Yes, there is "the second death," for those whose names are not written in the book of life, and this second death is not ceasing to exist any more than your passing through the article of death, is the ceasing to exist, "The lake of fire—this is the second death," But what about "destruction"? Are you indeed seeking relief in what they say of this term, that it signifies annihilation? I beg you, do not trust: then, for they have not placed for you a harbor light, but the dismal flame of the wreckers. They are again playing false—doubly false, to you and to the truth. We've but to substitute the word annihilation in a few texts where this word "destroy" occurs, to see that what they say is a tissue of lies—"O Israel, thou, hast annihilated thyself, but in Me is thy help." Help for those who have ceased to exist? "The world that then was was annihilated." Did it cease to exist? "Annihilate not him with thy meat for whom Christ died." Worse than folly! "He came to seek and to save that which was annihilated," that which had no existence, we suppose. They "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess. 1:9). If a thing ceases to exist, and destruction signifies this, it is plain it can not be "everlasting." O, men, you are face to face with a momentous issue—we entreat you—we warn you, don't miss your way.

But does "eternal" really mean "eternal"? Yes, solemnly, awfully—Yes. "Aionios" occurs sixty-eight times in the New Testament, and in each instance the word in itself has the force of endless duration. We might quote a few texts to be pondered with profit.

"The eternal God" (Rom. 16:26);

"The eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14);

"Eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12);

"Eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:9);

"Eternal life" (John 3:15-16, 36; 5:24);

"Eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10);

"To be cast into eternal fire" (Matt. 18:8);

"They shall be punished with eternal destruction" (2 Thess. 1:9);

"Is in danger of eternal damnation" (Mark 3:29).

At a glance it may be seen the same term is applied to God, the Holy Spirit, redemption, salvation, life and glory, that is used when it is a question of judgment, punishment and damnation of the wicked. But I draw your attention to Matthew 25:46, "And these shall go away into everlasting [aionios] punishment, but the righteous into life eternal [aionios]." Here the same term for endless duration is used of the punishment of the lost, and the blessing of the saved. On one hand there are those who "enter into eternal punishment;" on the other, those who enter "life eternal." But I draw your attention to the fact that this "everlasting fire" was not made for you, but "prepared for the devil and his angels."

In Revelation 5:14; it is said, "They worship Him who liveth forever and ever," and in chapter 15:11, it is said, "The smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever." Now if the punishment of the wicked is said to endure as long as the life of God Himself, what terms could

God have employed that He has not, if He had intended to convey to us the never ending character of the torment of the lost? But you are not to be frightened to believe that you can not understand the meaning of this term "eternal" unless you have a critical knowledge of Greek. Hear 2 Corinthians 4:18; "For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." This passage shows us beyond all controversy that the natural meaning of the word is eternal, in contrast with temporal. The word "forever" is used twenty-six times. In twenty-three of these texts it means "never" or 'eternal.' In these exceptions it is used for the whole of a particular period. It is never found to have a limited force in connection with the subject in hand, nor could it since this would involve us in setting the Spirit of God at variance with Himself, as the word eternal He so constantly employs, is without limitation, as you have heard. No amount of argument or dexterous explanation can empty this term of its awful meaning as applied to the destiny of those refusing Christ, The greater part of their proofs are from the Old Testament, so the mass of their texts refer to temporal judgments in this world. With one prominent writer out of nearly fifty quotations, forty-seven are from the Old Testament.

It is vain to charge "injustice for infinite punishment for a finite sin," since the enormity of the offense is measured not by the one who sins, but by the One sinned against, a common enough principle among men. Nor need we find in eternal punishment a clouding of the fact that "God is love," for this did not wait to express itself in the salvation of all men; it has been fully told in the gift of His Son "God so loved the world; that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." To save those who refuse to receive that Son, His loved One, would be consenting to His dishonor. His love has been more fully expressed in giving that Son than it would or could have been had man lived an eternity of innocence. Nor must we forget that "God is light." He can not compromise the claims of His throne, nor one of His attributes, as righteousness, holiness and truth. Furthermore, in contemplating what God is, don't forget to solemnly consider who God is. Our conclusions are always wrong when we seek a solution of things by beginning with ourselves. We must make our starting point His side; we must measure things from up there, from God's point of view, before whom "the nations are as a drop of a bucket." In Job 26, after spreading His vast and shining universe before us, He tells us, "Lo, these are the borders of His ways, but what a, whisper of a word," etc. (IND) When you see it all, you do not pass the edge of it, and when you hear it all, though it discloses His glory, so far short does it come of telling us all, it is but "a whisper of a word" we hear of Him. If the universe only whispers who He is, are we left to guess the rest? Far from it Jesus, the Word, is His full declaration, and the only One who could "declare Him" (John 1:18).

But to return, you might with equal propriety have difficulty in reconciling six thousand years of suffering and woe upon the whole human race, both bad and good. Here you have not the opportunity to juggle with words; it is a tremendous fact you face, a fact that "casts a veil over all nations" (Isa. 25). "God is omnipotent, and can only bless." No cobweb of theory can prevail here.

In spite of the fact that you've sought to fill the earth with music and song, below it all there is a dull diapason of sorrow well known to every heart. God's governmental hand is everywhere in evidence, even here, though He is love and full of compassion. You are sitting, too, upon your own case. It is as though a body of men indicted for murder, should, by agreement, come to the conclusion, that Blackstone had been misinterpreted, that there was no penal code on the statutes against such crime, but this conclusion would not effect the fact, nor alter the issue on the day of execution. Man having the status of a fallen creature, and "alienated in his mind by wicked works," how far can we trust his judgment as to God and His ways? Scripture is as plain as to "eternal judgment," as it is to eternal blessedness, and the principle of interpretation applied to those passages in which the endlessness of man's doom is presented, if applied to his future blessing, would deprive him of all hope beyond the grave. They may "quote the restitution of all things", but they omit the conclusion, "of which the prophets have spoken," and the prophets nowhere speak of the future salvation of those who die out of Christ. All of these delusive theories will evaporate with the last breath of those who have advanced them, When their utterances become an echo; (indeed, if they are not this now,) when their lips are silent, and they are learning by awful experience the dread realities of that hell which they might have escaped through faith in Jesus, and His blood, then this same word, with its warnings and woos, in living tones telling of a Savior God, will be speaking still. The effect of this teaching is to destroy the sense of responsibility, God-ward, and in people of grosser habits most debasing.

These men of pleasing wit, with heads as full of colors as a painter's shop, may allure you; their flights of fancy may charm you, but it's only fancy, bold enough, but tamed as I've seen it, in the presence of death, before that bit of coffined clay, until they speak soberly and subduedly, owning that they have not so much as a broken reed to lean upon at such a moment, for Scripture made uncertain in one place, ceases to be assuring any place.

It is known, too, and well known, that by men of smaller pretensions, they have been cleverly overmatched—the reading public need no proof of this. But that instrument divinely forged, of more than human temper is to be chosen, rather than the high drawn wit of the creature. If those who speak with tint and tinge were a little more rugged of utterance, used fewer cushioned words, and more with points and edges, there might be some pricking of heart and gashing of conscience.

You ask us, "Where is Hell?" At the end of a Christless life, and not so far away, for there's only a breath and a heart beat between your soul and eternity. But failure to establish the location of Vesuvius, for a man without eyes to see nor ears to hear, and with no knowledge of geography outside his own village, would in no way disprove its existence. Quibble not at symbolic language, but appalled in the presence of what it expresses, find refuge in Christ, the gift of God, who is waiting to be gracious. "Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and in Him, all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

But further: These annihilationists, materialists and universalists are never clear as to the person of Christ, and, of course, if your Savior is false, your salvation is false, too. You must be right as to Christ, for, "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins," and He is presenting Himself as the Eternal Self-existing One. The Russell school defrauds you of both His manhood and deity—indeed this belief, rather disbelief, leaves scarcely a vital truth of Christianity intact.

You lose incarnation, atonement, resurrection and every basis of hope, yet are all unconscious of it.

You can better arrive at the enormity of your offense, by considering the glory of the One who addressed Himself to the awful task of putting our sins away. It is the One by whom the worlds were made, Who made purgation of our sins (Heb. 1). And it was by Himself He did this, unaided—all alone. Angels were with Him at His birth, angels succored Him during His temptation, angels were His companions in the garden, but there was no angel at the cross. No created being could have part in this work. It was exclusively the work of the eternal Son. It took an infinite being to settle the question of our guilt; even the heathen contribute their witness to this, saying, "Socrates died like a philosopher,

Jesus died like a God." He who is reported to have said on that crucifixion day, as the heavens gathered blackness, the sun refused to shine and the stars withdrew their light, "Either the author of nature is suffering, or the universe is falling apart," was not wrong. Then need you wonder if it required a Victim like this ("the Lamb of God") to put away our sin; One capable of suffering infinitely, if there is for you eternal damnation if you despise and slight Him? I know of a confirmed infidel, who had for years resisted every appeal, refused every argument, and was intolerant of the gospel, but he had a dream. He thought he was transported to heaven where he saw a great, golden clock. This clock had no hands; it was surrounded with multitudes of shining forms with happy faces. He asked, "What time is it?" They replied joyfully, "There is no time here. Have you not heard what the pendulum says as it swings to and fro? 'Salvation ever—damnation never.'" He was then transported to the regions of the lost. Again he saw this great golden clock without hands. Unnumbered multitudes were there, dark forms, each face a face of despair. He asked again, "What time is it?" They answered mournfully, "There is no time here. Have you not heard what the pendulum says as it swings to and fro? 'Damnation ever—Salvation never.'"

It was only a dream, but it sent him to the Word of God, where he found a word in season for one that was weary: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Yes "give-you-rest." That single text has spoken more sweet peace to the souls of men than all the philosophies of all the world—and will you come? O, what relief He has for your wearied conscience"; and your burdened heart! Won't you go home tonight with something in your soul that was in heaven when you came here? Would you not like to hear Him say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee...thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace?"

Remember, if you pass into eternity without Christ, the die is cast; never one single ray of hope will penetrate that eternal gloom, and do you deliberately choose—darkness "outer darkness"? Man's day begins and ends in darkness; from midnight to midnight. God's thought is "the evening and the morning!" "the morning" at last. Thus Scripture begins, "Darkness was upon the face of the deep" and ends with, "There shall be no night there."

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