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HELL

#211

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THE GREATEST LOSS

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”—Mark 8:36

THE saying of our Lord Jesus Christ that stands at the head of this page ought to ring in our ears like a trumpet blast. It concerns our highest and best interests. It concerns our souls. What a solemn question these words of Scripture contain! What a mighty sum of profit and loss they propound¹ to us for calculation! Where is the accountant who could reckon it up? Where is the clever arithmetician who would not be baffled by that sum? “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

I wish to offer a few plain remarks to enforce and illustrate the question that the Lord Jesus asks in the passage before us. I invite the serious attention of all who read this...May all who take it up feel more deeply than they ever yet felt the value of an immortal soul! It is the first step toward heaven to find out the true worth of our souls.

THE FIRST REMARK I HAVE TO MAKE IS THIS: EVERY ONE OF US HAS AN UNDYING SOUL. I am not ashamed to begin...with these words. I dare say that they sound strange and foolish to some readers. I dare say that some will exclaim, “Who knoweth not such things as these? Who ever thinks of doubting that we have souls?” But I cannot forget that the world is just now fixing its attention on material things to a most extravagant extent. We live in an age of progress...We live in an age when the multitude are increasingly absorbed in earthly things... We live in an age when there is a false glare on the things of time and a great mist over the things of eternity. In an age like this, it is the bounden duty of the ministers of Christ to fall back upon first principles. Necessity is laid upon us. Woe is unto us if we do not press home on men our Lord’s question about the soul! Woe is unto us if we do not cry aloud, “The world is not all. The life that we now live in the flesh is not the only life. There is a life to come. We have souls.”

Let us establish it in our minds as a great fact that we all carry within our bosoms something that will never die. This body of ours that takes up so much of our thoughts and time to warm it, dress it, feed it, and make it comfortable—this body alone is not all the man. It is but the lodging of a noble tenant, and that tenant is the immortal soul! The death that each of us has to die one day does not make an end of the man. All is not over when the last breath is drawn and the doctor’s last visit has been paid—when the coffin is screwed down, and the funeral preparations are made—when “ashes to ashes and dust to dust” has been pronounced over the grave—when our place in the world is filled up, and the gap made by our absence from society is no longer noticed. No all is not over then! The spirit of man still lives on. Everyone has within him an undying soul...

What though we cannot see our souls? Are there not millions of things in existence that we cannot see with the naked eye? Who that has looked through the telescope or microscope can doubt that this is the case? What though we cannot see our souls? We can feel them. When we are alone on the bed of sickness and the world is shut out; when we watch by the deathbed of a friend; when we see those whom we love lowered into the grave—at times like these, who does not know the feelings that come across men’s minds? Who does not know that in hours like these something rises in the heart, telling us that there is a life to come and that all, from the highest to the lowest, have undying souls?...I can well believe [that] you are sometimes tempted to think this world is everything and the body all that is worth caring for. But resist the temptation and cast it behind you. Say to yourself every morning when you rise and every night when you lie down, “The fashion of this world passeth away. The life that I now live is not all. There is something beside business, money, pleasure, commerce, and trade. There is a life to come. We all have immortal souls.”

THE SECOND REMARK I HAVE TO MAKE IS THIS: ANYONE MAY LOSE HIS OWN SOUL. This is a sorrowful portion of my subject. But it is one that I dare not, cannot pass by. I have no sympathy with those who prophesy nothing but peace and keep back from men the awful fact that they may lose their souls. I am one of those old-fashioned ministers who believe the whole Bible and *everything* that it contains. I can find no Scriptural foundation for that smooth-spoken theology that pleases so many in these days, and according to which everybody will get to heaven at

¹ **propound** – put forward for consideration.

last. I believe that there is a real devil. I believe that there is a real hell. I believe that it is not charity² to keep back from men that they may be lost. Charity shall I call it?...If you saw a blind man tottering towards a precipice,³ would you not cry out, “Stop!”? Away with such false notions of charity!...It is the highest charity to bring the whole truth before men. It is real charity to warn them plainly, when they are in danger. It is charity to impress upon them that they may lose their own souls forever in hell...

Weak as we are in all that is good, we have a mighty power to do ourselves harm. You cannot save that soul of yours...remember that! You cannot make your own peace with God. You cannot wipe away a single sin. You cannot blot out one of the black records that stand in the book of God against you. You cannot change your own heart. But there is one thing you can do: you can lose your own soul...

But who is responsible for the loss of our souls? *No one but ourselves.* Our blood will be upon our own heads. The blame will lie at our own door. We shall have nothing to plead at the Last Day when we stand before the Great White Throne and the books are opened. When the King comes in to see His guests and says, “Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” (Mat 22:12), we shall be speechless. We shall have no excuse to plead for the loss of our souls.

But where does the soul go when lost? There is only one solemn answer to that question. There is but one place to which it can go, and that is hell. There is no such thing as annihilation. The lost soul goes to that place where the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched—where there is blackness and darkness, wretchedness and despair forever. It goes to hell—the only place for which it is [suited], since it is not [suited] for heaven. “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Psa 9:17).

We live in an age of great temptation. The devil is going about and is very busy. The night is far spent. The time is short. Do not lose your own soul.

From “Our Souls” in *Old Paths*, reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust, www.banneroftruth.org.

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900): Anglican Bishop; author of *Holiness, Knots Untied, Old Paths*, and many others; born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England.

If you have no love for souls, it is greatly to be feared that your own soul is in imminent danger.—*A. W. Pink*

WHAT IS HELL?

Edward Donnelly

“Flee from the wrath to come.”—Matthew 3:7

IN the New Testament Church, the doctrine of hell seems to have been one of the ABCs for new converts. The writer to the Hebrews refers to “eternal judgment” as an elementary principle of Christ (Heb 6:1-2)—in other words, foundational teaching introduced at the beginning of the Christian life. In our day, however, it has been neglected; and we need to take time to clarify our understanding.

We can summarize the main aspects of the biblical doctrine of hell in five simple propositions...**WHAT IS HELL?**

1. A REAL PLACE CREATED BY GOD: A popular contemporary idea of hell is that it is no more than a metaphor for the unhappiness we experience in this life. In the memorable words of French existentialist⁴ philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre,⁵ “No need of brimstone⁶ or gridiron.⁷ Hell is other people.” For him, hell was the pain caused by the

² **charity** – love.

³ **tottering...precipice** – walking unsteadily toward a very steep cliff.

⁴ **existentialist** – a philosopher who emphasizes freedom of choice and personal responsibility but who regards human existence in a hostile universe as unexplainable.

⁵ **Jean Paul Sartre** (1905-1980) – French writer and existentialist philosopher.

cruelty of our fellow human beings. People speak of devastating experiences as “hellish.” “I have been through hell,” they say. Hell is seen as the dark side of life, the sadness and suffering through which people pass.

None of this is true. Hell is a real place.⁸ It is not a metaphor or a symbol, not a description of our inner desolation or our present sufferings, no matter how agonizing these may be. It is not a state of mind. It is a place with spatial⁹ dimensions. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man speaks of “this place of torment” (Luk 16:28), using the normal Greek word for “place” from which our word *topography* comes—the science of describing places. We are told that the doomed Judas Iscariot went “to his own place” (Act 1:25). We do not know where in the universe that place is, but it has a precise location somewhere. The Bible indicates its remoteness from God’s life and light by describing it as “out” (Mat 8:12), “without” (Rev 22:15), “outer darkness” (Mat 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

The most characteristic name for hell in the New Testament is Gehenna, a word with an interesting history. It referred to the valley of Hinnom, just outside Jerusalem, where the Israelites had burned their children in sacrifice to the Ammonite god Molech (2Ch 28:3; 33:6; 2Ki 23:10). It was a place of devilment¹⁰ and heart-wrenching grief. By the first century, this valley of Hinnom had become a rubbish dump where offal¹¹ was burned day and night. The people of Jesus’ day associated it with smoke, stench, and worms—all that was hideous and foul. This is the horribly vivid term chosen by our Lord as an appropriate picture of the real hell.

Because it is a place, it has been created by God...It was by His command that everlasting fire was “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat 25:41)...

2. JUST, TERRIBLE, AND EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT: Hell is a place of punishment. Is any idea more unpopular today? Not all kinds of punishment, of course. Remedial punishment, designed to make the offender a better person, is just about acceptable. The forces of political correctness have not yet managed to persuade governments to remove from parents the right to discipline children. The purpose of discipline is to teach them not to do wrong. Our hope is that our children will learn from this unpleasant experience and that we will not have to punish them again. The prison service follows the same philosophy, where the stated aim of imprisonment is the rehabilitation of the criminal. And some will admit a role for preventative punishment, employing it as a deterrent to keep others from committing the same offence and thus suffering a similar penalty. Such action serves as a warning flag to the community, and the correction of the guilty few is meant to ensure the continued obedience of the law-abiding many.

But the punishment that today’s world will not tolerate is that which is retributive—punishment inflicted simply as recompense for evil done because it is just that wrongdoers should suffer; punishment that marks abhorrence of wrong and commitment to right. Such punishment is regarded as barbaric and immoral. This is not because people have become more humane or civilized, but because they are frightened by a dark specter.¹² The shadow of hell haunts them. Disturbing whispers of *judgment to come* echo on the fringes of their consciousness. These intimations of God’s wrath so terrify them that they will do all in their power to airbrush any idea of retributive punishment from our society...For punishment in hell *is* retributive. It is not remedial. It does not make anyone better. Purgatory, the idea that humans will be cleansed and improved through their sufferings after death, is a myth. The pains of hell are of absolutely no benefit to those who are being punished. Nor is such punishment preventative, except insofar as hearing of it now may turn people from sin to Christ. When God opens the judgment books and proclaims the final destiny of all, the punishment pronounced will be what people hate and fear above all: retributive punishment, imposed because wrong is wrong and God is against it...

This punishment will be just because it is imposed by the holy Lord God, Whose judgments are altogether true and righteous. Scripture tells us that, although all the ungodly will be punished, they will not all be punished to the same degree. Some will suffer more than others will: the greater the guilt, the greater the penalty. God will deal with sins committed in ignorance less severely than with acts of conscious disobedience: “And that servant, which

⁶ **brimstone** – an old name for sulfur.

⁷ **gridiron** – a frame of iron bars used as an instrument of torture by fire.

⁸ “Hell is a place of torment ordained by God for devils and reprobate sinners wherein, by His justice, He confines them to everlasting punishment, tormenting them both in body and soul, being deprived of God’s favor, objects of His wrath under which they must lie to all eternity.” (Christopher Love, *The Works of Christopher Love*, Vol. 1, 565.)

⁹ **spatial** – relating to or occupying space.

¹⁰ **devilment** – devilish or malicious behavior.

¹¹ **offal** – refuse; garbage.

¹² **specter** – a haunting fear; a ghostly apparition or phantom.

knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not...shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luk 12:47-48).

Privileges neglected will increase the penalty received, for Christ gives a solemn warning to cities in Galilee where He had preached and performed miracles: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida!...It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon...[and] for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Mat 11:21-24). This must have been a staggering statement to those who first heard it! Respectable Galilean fishing villages more guilty in God's eyes than heathen Tyre or perverted Sodom! But such is the enormity of hearing and rejecting the Son of God. Scribes, who had unrivalled exposure to the Scriptures but who often proved hypocritical, greedy, or dishonest, "shall receive greater damnation" (Mar 12:38-40). Here is a sobering consideration for anyone brought up in a Christian home but still uncommitted to the Savior. The deepest pits of hell may well be reserved not for the notoriously wicked, but for those who from childhood were familiar with the message of salvation, yet never embraced it for themselves.

We are not told how the punishment will be graded. Perhaps God will inflict greater pain on some. Perhaps there will be a keener awareness of opportunities neglected, a deeper remorse. The worm of memory—a father's teaching or a mother's prayers—may be part of the torture of the damned in hell. The Bible does not tell us...But we do know that the punishment will be unchallengeably just. No one will ever be able to complain that it is not fair or that they have not deserved it. Hell is just.

It is also terrible, for it is a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mat 8:12), where "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mar 9:44). Those in hell will "drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation." And they "shall be tormented with fire and brimstone... And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night" (Rev 14:10-11). This is...fearsome.

And it is everlasting. In spite of specious¹³ modern "difficulties," the teaching of Scripture is crystal clear. We are told of "everlasting destruction" (2Th 1:9), "everlasting fire...everlasting punishment" (Mat 25:41, 46), and in each case the same Greek word is used as that applied to "everlasting" life. Just as the joys of heaven are eternal, so are the pains of hell. Jude speaks of "the vengeance of eternal fire" (v. 7) and of "the blackness of darkness forever" (v. 13).

How appalling this punishment will be—just, terrible, and everlasting! John Calvin¹⁴ says, "By such expressions the Holy Spirit certainly intended to confound all our senses with dread."¹⁵

3. FOR THE DEVIL, HIS ANGELS, AND THE UNSAVED: "All the interesting people will be in hell," wrote the Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw,¹⁶ in a piece of flippant¹⁷ blasphemy. But that is not what the Bible tells us.

The devil will be in hell, "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone" (Rev 20:10). Accompanying him will be "his angels" (Mat 25:41), at present "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 1:6). These demons, already aware of their ultimate destiny when Jesus was on earth, cowered before the Savior's power: "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us?...And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep¹⁸" (Mar 1:24; Luk 8:31).

Hell is also for the notoriously wicked. "But 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" (Rev 21:8). What a repellent rogues' gallery! These are George Bernard Shaw's "interesting people."

But it is not only the blatantly evil who will find themselves in hell. The Apostle Paul identifies for us those on whom God will take vengeance "in flaming fire." Who are they? What monsters of depravity can they be? The Hitlers? The Stalins? Yes. But also all "them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus

¹³ **specious** – appearing to be true but actually false.

¹⁴ **John Calvin** (1509-1564) – influential French theologian, preacher, pastor, and reformer; one of the founders of the Reformed branch of Christianity; ministered primarily in Geneva, Switzerland.

¹⁵ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III. xxv. 12.

¹⁶ **George Bernard Shaw** (1856-1950) – playwright; socialist; member of the Fabian Society.

¹⁷ **flippant** – showing a lack of seriousness and respect.

¹⁸ **deep** – abyss; bottomless pit.

Christ” (2Th 1:8). Outwardly upright, decent people, many of them. Good citizens, caring parents, reliable employees, friendly neighbors—but they never trusted Christ as Savior. They refused to “obey the gospel.”

Are you in that position? You may think of yourself as a reasonably good person. You may [think] that you are not guilty of any great crime, that you have never done anything of which you are really ashamed. But the Gospel says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” and you have not obeyed that command. Even if you were never to commit another sin, God will take vengeance in flaming fire upon you if you do not obey His Gospel. Only those will escape hell who have trusted in Christ. “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (Joh 3:36). But “he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (Joh 5:24).

4. THE IRREVOCABLE¹⁹ DESTINY OF THE UNBELIEVER AT DEATH: On the Day of Judgment, the bodies of unbelievers who have died will be raised from the grave, reunited with their souls, and cast into hell. But we need to remember that their souls are in hell already. There is no no-man’s-land in the universe, no waiting room between heaven and hell, no soul sleep or period of unconsciousness until the second coming of Christ. Souls that do not still inhabit their bodies are either in heaven or in hell.

When believers die, their souls go immediately to be with Christ. Paul wanted “to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phi 1:23). The Savior Himself said to the dying thief, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luk 23:43); and that is precisely what happens to every Christian at death. Conversely, when an unbeliever dies, he goes to be with Satan, which is far worse. As he passes from this earth, the devil whispers gloatingly, “Today you will be with me in hell.” No other possibilities exist. Our souls will be with Christ or with Satan.

The Old Testament *Sheol* and the New Testament *Hades* have been taken by some to refer to a neutral, intermediate state, occupied by all humans before the return of Christ. But this is due to a misunderstanding, for these words are used in Scripture in at least two senses. They refer sometimes to the grave to which we all go and sometimes to the place of punishment to which believers do not go. The King James Version correctly varies its translation of Sheol according to the context, from “grave” or “pit” to “hell.”

While Scripture has more to say about the destiny of believers than about that of the lost, its teaching is nonetheless quite plain regarding those who die without Christ. Our Lord’s parable of the rich man and Lazarus clearly refers to the period before the general resurrection: the rich man has died and been buried, and his five brothers are still alive on the earth. The end of the world has not come. But, though dead, he is conscious because “in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.” His body is decaying in the ground, but his soul is experiencing agony in hell. “I am tormented,” he cries, “in this flame” (Luk 16:23-24).

All who have died in unbelief are suffering at this moment. “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished”²⁰ (2Pe 2:9). There is no second chance, no future hope, no point in praying for the dead. They are beyond our prayers, which can no longer help them. Even Almighty God Himself will not help them.

That is why the Gospel is so urgent. That is why God calls on us to believe today; for once we die, it is too late. The soul is, at that moment, irrevocably lost, awaiting only its reunion with the doomed body at the Last Day.

5. RULED BY GOD AND EXISTING FOR HIS GLORY: We need to emphasize that hell is ruled by God, for there is a popular idea that it is somehow outside His presence and reach. People think of hell as a kind of nuclear waste repository in which God will enclose the wicked. It will then be sealed, buried, and forgotten about; and the souls in that dreadful place of torment will be left to their own devices. Perhaps John Milton,²¹ great Puritan though he was, is partly responsible for this misconception. In *Paradise Lost*, he devotes a great deal of attention to Satan, the chief angel. As the devil is about to enter hell, Milton makes him say, “Here at least we shall be free...Here we may reign secure, and in my choice to reign is worth ambition, though in hell: Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.”

The poet is giving him a ghastly kind of hope. “Here we shall be free...we may reign secure.” Perhaps that is indeed what Satan thought and hoped for. “I may be wretched, but I’ll be my own master. This may be a place of misery, but at least I will be able to get away from God.” Many agree with him and see hell as the place where Satan reigns.

¹⁹ **irrevocable** – impossible to change.

²⁰ Literally translated, “to keep the unrighteous in a state of continuous punishment until the Day of Judgment.”

²¹ **John Milton** (1608-1674) – English poet and scholar who is best known for the epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667, revised 1674), an account of humanity’s fall from grace.

But it is not true. Hell is where God alone reigns. It is not an independent, self-contained demonic kingdom. God, who “hath power to cast into hell” (Luk 12:5), rules it and has prepared its fires (Mat 25:41). He is present in hell, for the damned are tormented “in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb” (Rev 14:10). What an awful and mysterious statement!...

No, the devil does not reign in hell. We must not represent him as a James Dean-type²² figure, a tragic, heroic rebel, who stands alone and shakes his fist at God. Milton makes that mistake when he puts the following words into Satan’s mouth: “What though the field be lost? All is not lost; the unconquerable will...and courage never to submit or yield: That glory never shall his wrath or might extort from me. To bow and sue for grace with suppliant²³ knee, and deify his power...That were an ignominy²⁴ and shame beneath this downfall.”

It strikes a chord deep inside us, does it not? Terrible though it may be, there is something magnificent about an indomitable²⁵ will, the head that is bloody but unbowed, the spirit that cannot be broken. Such defiance appeals to our arrogant, fallen nature. But it is bogus. “At the name of Jesus every knee [shall] bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth...every tongue [shall] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phi 2:10). Satan will not be “free,” his will is not “unconquerable,” his “courage” will be non-existent, his “ignominy and shame” total. “All is” already “lost.” He will not be a dark prince, awesome in his wicked dignity, but a contemptible being, cowering before the mighty King and Lord of all. God rules in hell as He rules in heaven.

We must remember also that hell exists for God’s glory...In hell, and we can say this only in trembling reverence, God’s glory will be unveiled in new and amazing ways. His kingly authority will be seen more clearly than has ever been possible before. Fresh aspects of His holiness and justice will be revealed to His wondering people.

We can dare to believe this because Scripture teaches it. The last book of the Bible shows us the sinless inhabitants of heaven praising and thanking God for hell. The twenty-four elders fall on their faces before Him, saying, “We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty... because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged” (Rev 11:17-18).

The angel of the waters praises the Lord for His judgments: “Thou art righteous, O Lord...because thou hast judged thus...and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy” (Rev 16:5-6). Like all else in creation, hell exists for God’s glory.

From *Biblical Teaching on the Doctrines of Heaven and Hell*, published by
The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009, pp. 16-24, used by permission, www.banneroftruth.org.

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ETERNAL TORMENT FOR THE WICKED: UNAVOIDABLE AND INTOLERABLE

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

*“Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee?
I the LORD have spoken it, and will do it.”—Ezekiel 22:14*

²² **James Dean** (1931-1955) – American actor whose rebellious character in films such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) made him a symbol of alienated youth.

²³ **suppliant** – humbly begging.

²⁴ **ignominy** – disgrace.

²⁵ **indomitable** – unconquerable.

I SHALL SHOW WHAT IS IMPLIED IN GOD'S UNDERTAKING TO DEAL WITH IMPENITENT SINNERS. Others are not able to deal with them. They baffle all the means used with them by those that are appointed to teach and to rule over them. They will not yield to parents or to the counsels, warnings, or reproofs of ministers. They prove obstinate and stiff-hearted. Therefore, God undertakes to deal with them:

1. God will reckon with them and take of them satisfaction to His justice. In this world, God puts forth His authority to command them and to require their subjection to Him. In His commands, He is very positive, strictly requiring of them the performance of duties, and as positively forbidding things contrary to their duty. But they have no regard to these commands. God continues commanding, and they continue rebelling. They make nothing of God's authority. God threatens, but they despise His threatenings. They make nothing of dishonoring God. They care not how much their behavior is to His dishonor. He [declares His] mercy if they will repent and return, but they despise His mercy as well as His wrath. God calleth, but they refuse. Thus, they are continually plunging themselves deeper and deeper in debt. At the same time, [they] imagine they shall escape the payment of the debt and design entirely to rob God of His due.

But God hath undertaken to right Himself. He will reckon with them. He hath undertaken to see that the debts due to Him are paid. All their sins are written in His book: not one of them is forgotten, and every one must be paid...“He will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face” (Deu 7:10).

2. He hath undertaken to vindicate the honor of His majesty. His majesty they despise. They hear that He is a great God, but they de-spise His greatness. They look upon Him as worthy of contempt and treat Him accordingly. They hear of Him by the name of a great King, but His authority they regard not and sometimes trample upon it for years together.

But God hath not left the honor of His majesty wholly to their care. Though they now trample it in the dust, yet that is no sign that it will finally be lost. If God had left it wholly to their hands, it would indeed be lost. But God doth not leave His honor and His glory with His enemies. It is too precious in His eyes to be so neglected. He hath reserved the care of it to Himself...Sinners despise His Son and trample Him under their feet. But He will...make the glory of His Son appear with respect to them. All the earth [will] know how evil a thing it is to despise the Son of God. God intends that all men and angels, all heaven and all earth shall see whether He be sufficient to magnify Himself upon sinners who now despise Him...

3. He hath undertaken to subdue impenitent sinners. Their hearts while in this world are very unsubdued. They lift up their heads, conduct themselves very proudly and contemptuously, and often sin with a high hand. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongues walk through the earth...They say to God, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways” (Job 21:14).

Some, who cover their sin with their specious²⁶ show, who put on a face of religion and a demure²⁷ countenance and behavior, yet have this spirit secretly reigning in their breasts. Notwithstanding all their fair show and good external carriage, they despise God in their hearts...Their hearts are full of pride, enmity, stubbornness, and blasphemy, which work in them many ways while they sit under the preaching of the Word and while the Spirit of God is striving in them...They never lay down the weapons of their rebellion. But God hath undertaken to deal with them and to subdue them. Those proud and stubborn hearts that will not yield to the power of God's Word shall be broken by the power of His hand...

Wicked men not only hate God, but they slight Him. They are not afraid of Him. But He will subdue their contempt. When He shall come to take them in hand, they will hate Him still; but they will not slight Him...They will find by sufficient experience that His wrath is not to be slighted. They will learn this to their cost, and they never will forget it.

4. God hath undertaken to rectify their judgments. Now they will not be convinced of those things that God tells them in His Word. Ministers take many pains to convince them, but all is in vain. Therefore, God will undertake to convince them, and He will do it effectually...Now they always doubt the truth of the Scriptures, questioning whether they be the Word of God and whether the threatenings of Scripture be true. But God hath undertaken to convince them that those threatenings are true, and He will make them to know that they are true, so that they will never doubt anymore forever. They will be convinced by dear experience. Now they are always questioning whether there be any such place as hell. They hear much about it, but it always seems to them like a dream. But

²⁶ **specious** – deceptively attractive.

²⁷ **demure** – sober; serious.

God will make it seem otherwise than a dream...Now ministers often tell sinners of the great importance of an interest in Christ, and that [it] is the one thing needful. They are also told the folly of delaying the care of their souls and how much it concerns them to improve their opportunity. But the instructions of ministers do not convince them, therefore God will undertake to convince them.

Impenitent sinners, while in this world, hear how dreadful hell is. But they will not believe that it is as dreadful as ministers represent. They cannot think that they shall suffer to all eternity such exquisite²⁸ and horrible torments. But they shall be taught and convinced to purpose that the representations ministers give of those torments [that are] agreeable to the Word of God are indeed as dreadful as they declare. Since God hath undertaken to deal with sinners and to rectify their judgments in these matters, He will do it thoroughly...

IMPENITENT SINNERS SHALL NOT AVOID THEIR DUE PUNISH-MENT...That God hath declared that He will punish impenitent sinners is manifest from many Scriptures: "I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me" (Deu 32:41). "He will not be slack to him that hateth him: he will repay him to his face" (Deu 7:10)...God saith in the text, "I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it." [This] leaves no room to doubt of the actual fulfillment of the threatening in its utmost extent...If it were indeed only a man—a being of like impotency and mutability with themselves who had undertaken to deal with them—they might perhaps with some reason flatter themselves that they should find some means to avoid the threatened punishment. But since an omniscient, omnipotent, immutable God hath undertaken, all such hopes are vain.

There is no hope that...they may steal away to heaven, though they die unconverted. There is no hope that they can deceive God by any false show of repentance and faith, and so be taken to heaven through mistake...There is no hope of escaping the threatened punishment by sinking into nothing at death, like brute creatures...There is no hope of their escaping without notice when they leave the body. There is no hope that God, by reason of the multiplicity of affairs that He hath to [attend to] will happen to overlook them and not take notice of them when they come to die...There is no hope that they shall be missed in a crowd at the Day of Judgment and that they can have opportunity to hide themselves in some cave or den of the mountains or in any secret hole of the earth...Neither is there any hope that they will be able to crowd themselves in among the multitude of the saints at the right hand of the Judge and so go to heaven undiscovered. Nor is there any hope that God will alter His mind or that He will repent of what He hath said...When did God ever undertake to do anything and fail?

IMPENITENT SINNERS CANNOT SHUN THE THREATENED PUNISH-MENT. Neither can they do anything to deliver themselves from it or to relieve themselves under it. This is implied in those words of the text, "Can thine hands be strong?"...The wicked in hell will have no strength of hand to accomplish anything at all for themselves or to bring to pass any deliverance or any degree of relief.

1. They will not be able in that conflict to overcome their Enemy and so to deliver themselves. God, Who will then undertake to deal with them and will gird Himself with might to execute wrath, will be their Enemy...They will have no strength to oppose Him...They will have no power, no might to resist that omnipotence, which will be engaged against them.

2. They will have no strength in their hands to do anything to appease God or in the least to abate the fierceness of His wrath. They will not be able to offer any satisfaction: they will not be able to procure God's pity. Though they cry, God will not hear them...

3. They will not be able to find any to befriend them and intercede with God for them. They had the [proclamation] of a Mediator often made them in this world, but they will have no such [calling] in hell. None will befriend them in hell...They will have no friend in heaven: none of the saints or angels will befriend them...There will be no creature that will have any power to deliver them, nor will any ever pity them.

4. Nor will they ever be able to make their escape. They will find no means to break prison and flee. In hell, they will be reserved in chains of darkness forever and ever...None ever escaped out of the prison of hell, which is God's prison. It is a strong prison: it is beyond any finite power or the united strength of all wicked men and devils to unlock or break open the door of that prison. Christ hath the key of hell: He "shutteth, and no man openeth" (Rev 3:7).

5. Nor will they ever be able to find anything to relieve them in hell. They will never find any resting place there [or] any secret corner that will be cooler than the rest...They will find no company to give them any comfort or to

²⁸ **exquisite** – intense; extreme.

do them the least good...For they will be tormented with fire and brimstone and will have no rest day nor night forever and ever.

NEITHER WILL THEY BE ABLE TO BEAR [THEIR PUNISHMENT]...It is common with men, when they meet with calamities in this world, in the first place to endeavor to shun them. But if they find that they cannot shun them, then after they come, they endeavor to deliver themselves from them as soon as they can or at least to deliver themselves in *some* degree. But if they find that they can by no means deliver themselves and see that they must bear them, then they fortify their spirits and take up a resolution that they will support themselves under them as well as they can. But it will be utterly in vain for impenitent sinners to think to do thus with respect to the torments of hell. They will not be able to endure them or to support themselves under them at all. The torment will be immensely beyond their strength. What will it signify for a worm that is about to be pressed under the weight of some great rock...to collect its strength, to set itself to bear up the weight of the rock, and to preserve itself from being crushed by it? Much more [futile] will it be for a poor damned soul to endeavor to support itself under the weight of the wrath of Almighty God...

When sinners hear of hell-torments, they sometimes think with themselves, "Well, if it shall come to that—that I must go to hell—I will bear it as well as I can," as if by clothing themselves with resolution and firmness of mind, they would be able to support themselves in some measure. Alas! They will have no resolution, no courage at all. However they shall have prepared themselves and collected their strength, as soon as they shall begin to feel that wrath, their hearts will melt and be as water. However they may seem to harden their hearts in order to prepare themselves to bear, the first moment they feel it, their hearts will become like wax before the furnace. Their courage and resolution will be all gone in an instant. It will vanish away like a shadow, in the twinkling of an eye. The stoutest and sturdiest will have no more courage than the feeblest infant would...They will not be able to keep alive any courage, any strength, any comfort, any hope at all.

TO ANSWER AN INQUIRY WHICH MAY NATURALLY BE RAISED CONCERNING THESE THINGS: Some may be ready to say, "If this be the case, if impenitent sinners can neither shun future punishment, deliver themselves from it, nor bear it, what will become of them?"

They will wholly sink down into eternal death. There will be that sinking of heart of which we now cannot conceive. We see how it is with the body when in extreme pain. The nature of the body will support itself for a considerable time under very great pain to keep from wholly sinking. There will be great struggles, lamentable groans, pantings, and, it may be, convulsions. These are the strugglings of nature to support itself under the extremity of the pain. There is, as it were, a great [unwillingness] in nature to yield to it. It cannot bear wholly to sink.

Yet sometimes pain of body is so very exquisite that the nature of the body cannot support itself under it. However [unwilling] it may be to sink, yet it cannot bear the pain. There are a few struggles, throes, pantings, maybe a shriek or two—then nature yields to the violence of the torments, sinks down, and the body dies. This is the death of the body. *So it will be with the soul in hell.* It will have no strength or power to deliver itself. Its torment and horror will be so great, so mighty, so vastly disproportioned to its strength that having no strength in the least to support itself, although it be infinitely contrary to the nature and inclination of the soul utterly to sink; yet it will utterly and totally sink without the least degree of remaining comfort, strength, courage, or hope. Though it will never be annihilated, its being and perception will never be abolished...

We can conceive but little of the matter. To help your conception, imagine yourself to be cast into a fiery oven or a great furnace, where your pain would be as much greater than that occasioned by accidentally touching a coal of fire, as the heat is greater. Imagine also that your body were to lie there for a quarter of an hour, full of fire, and all the while full of [vivid] sense. What horror would you feel at the entrance of such a furnace! How long would that quarter of an hour seem to you! And after you had endured it for one minute, how overbearing would it be to you to think that you had it to endure the other fourteen! But what would be the effect on your soul if you knew you must lie there enduring that torment to the full for twenty-four hours! How much greater would be the effect if you knew you must endure it for a whole year! And how vastly greater still if you knew you must endure it for a thousand years! O then, how your hearts would sink if you knew that you must bear it forever and ever! That there would be no end! That after millions of millions of ages, your torment would be no nearer to an end and that you never, never should be delivered!...This is the death threatened in the Law. This is dying in the highest sense of the word. This is to die sensibly, to die and *know* it, to be sensible of the gloom of death. This is to be undone. This is worthy of the name of destruction. This sinking of the soul under an infinite weight that it cannot bear is the

gloom of hell. We read in Scripture of the blackness of darkness—this is it! This is the very thing. We read in Scripture of sinners being lost and of their losing their souls—this is the thing intended. This is to lose the soul. They that are the subjects of this are utterly lost...

Consider these things, all you enemies of God and rejecters of Christ, whether you be old men and women, Christless heads of families, or young people and wicked children. Be assured that if you do not hearken and repent, God intends to show His wrath and make His power known upon you. He intends to magnify Himself exceedingly in sinking you down in hell. He intends to show His great majesty at the Day of Judgment in your misery before a greater assembly many thousand-fold than ever yet appeared on earth, before a vast assembly of saints, a vast assembly of wicked men, a vast assembly of holy angels, and before all the crew of devils. God will before all these get Himself honor in your destruction. You shall be tormented in the presence of them all. Then all will see that God is a great God indeed; then all will see how dreadful a thing it is to sin against such a God and to reject such a Savior, such love and grace, as you have rejected and despised. All will be filled with awe at the great sight, and all the saints and angels will look upon you and adore that majesty, that mighty power, and that holiness and justice of God, which shall appear in your ineffable²⁹ destruction and misery.

From “The Future Punishment of the Wicked Unavoidable and Intolerable”
in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, reprinted by The Banner
of Truth Trust, www.banneroftruth.org.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758): American Congregational preacher; preached during the Great Awakening; born in East Windsor, Connecticut Colony.

THE RESURRECTION OF DAMNATION

Samuel Davies (1723-1761)

“The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”—John 5:29

SEE a glorious multitude, which none can number, openly acquitted, pronounced blessed, and welcomed into the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Mat 25:34)! Now they enter upon a state that deserves the name of *life*. They are all vital, all active, all glorious, all happy. They *shine brighter than the stars in the firmament, like the sun forever and ever*. All their faculties overflow with happiness. They mingle with the glorious company of angels. They behold that Savior Whom unseen they loved. They dwell in eternal intimacy with the Father of their spirits. They are employed with ever new and growing delight in the exalted services of the heavenly sanctuary. They shall never more fear, nor feel the least touch of sorrow, pain, or any kind of misery, but shall be as happy as their natures can admit through an immortal duration. What a glorious new creation is here! What illustrious³⁰ creatures formed of the dust! Shall any of us join in this happy company? Oh, shall any of us feeble, dying, sinful creatures share in their glory and happiness? This is a most interesting inquiry...

The prospect would be delightful, if our charity could hope that this will be the happy end of all the sons of men. But, alas! Multitudes...shall come forth, not to the resurrection of life, but to the res-urrection of damnation!

²⁹ **ineffable** – indescribable.

³⁰ **illustrious** – shining.

What terror is in the sound! If audacious³¹ sinners in our world make light of it...their infernal³² brethren that feel its tremendous import are not so hardy, but tremble, groan, and can trifle with³³ it no more.

LET US REALIZE THE MISERABLE DOOM OF THIS CLASS OF MANKIND. See them bursting into life from their subterranean³⁴ dungeons...Horror throbs through every vein and glares wild and furious in their eyes. Every joint trembles and every countenance looks downcast and gloomy. Now they see that tremendous Day of which they were warned in vain and shudder at those terrors of which they once made light. They immediately know the grand business of the Day and the dreadful purpose for which they are roused from their slumbers in the grave: to be tried, to be convicted, to be condemned, and to be dragged away to execution.

Conscience has been anticipating the trial in a separate state, and no sooner is the soul united to the body than immediately conscience ascends its throne in the breast. [It] begins to accuse, to convict, to pass sentence, to upbraid,³⁵ and to torment. The sinner is condemned, condemned at his own tribunal before he arrives at the bar of his Judge.

The first act of consciousness in his new state of existence is a conviction that he is condemned—an irrevocably³⁶ condemned creature. He enters the court, knowing beforehand how it will go with him. When he finds himself ordered to the left hand of his Judge, when he hears the dreadful sentence thundered out against him, “Depart from me, ye cursed” (Mat 25:41), it was but what he expected. [At the present time,] he can flatter himself with vain hopes and shut his eyes against the light of conviction, but then he will not be able to hope better. Then he must know the worst of his case. The formality of the judicial trial is necessary for the conviction of the world, but not for his: his own conscience has already determined his condition. However, to convince others of the justice of his doom, he is dragged and guarded from his grave to the Judgment Seat...

With what *horror* does he view the burning throne and the frowning face of his Judge—that Jesus Whom he once disregarded...How he [wishes] for a covering of rocks and mountains to conceal him from His angry eye! But all in vain. Appear he must. He is ordered to the left among the trembling criminals.

NOW THE TRIAL COMES ON. All his evil deeds and all his omissions of duty are now produced against him. All the mercies he abused, all the chastisements he despised, all the means of grace he neglected or misimproved,³⁷ every sinful and even every idle word, nay, his most secret thoughts and dispositions are all exposed and brought into judgment against him. When the Judge puts it to him, “Is it not so, sinner? Are not these charges true?” conscience obliges him to confess and cry out, “Guilty! Guilty!”

Now the trembling criminal being plainly convicted and left without all plea and all excuse, the supreme Judge, in stern majesty and inexorable³⁸ justice, thunders out the dreadful sentence, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat 25:41). Oh tremendous doom! Every word is big with terror and shoots a thunderbolt through the heart. “Depart! Away from My presence! I cannot bear so loathsome a sight. I once [called] thee to come to Me that thou mightest have life, but thou wouldst not regard the [call]. Now thou shalt never hear that inviting voice more. Depart from Me—from Me, the only Fountain of happiness, the only proper Good for an immortal mind.”

“But, Lord,” we may suppose the criminal to say, “if I must depart, bless me before I go.”

“No,” says the angry Judge, “depart accursed. Depart with My eternal and heavy curse upon thee; the curse of that power that made thee; a curse dreadfully efficacious,³⁹ which blasts whatever it falls upon like flashes of consuming, irresistible lightning.”

“But if I must go away under Thy curse,” the criminal may be supposed to say, “let that be all my punishment. Let me depart to some agreeable or at least tolerable recess,⁴⁰ where I may meet with something to mitigate⁴¹ the curse.”

³¹ **audacious** – defiant; disrespectful.

³² **infernal** – belonging to hell.

³³ **trifle with** – treat without seriousness.

³⁴ **subterranean** – beneath the earth.

³⁵ **upbraid** – find fault with.

³⁶ **irrevocably** – impossible to reverse or change.

³⁷ **misimproved** – failed to use to good purpose.

³⁸ **inexorable** – not moved by anyone’s attempt to persuade.

³⁹ **efficacious** – successful in producing the intended result; effective.

⁴⁰ **tolerable recess** – remote, secluded space that is not too unpleasant.

⁴¹ **mitigate** – to make less severe.

“No, depart into fire. There burn in all the excruciating tortures of that outrageous element.”

“But, Lord, if I must make my bed in fire, oh, let it be a transient⁴² blaze that will soon burn itself out and put an end to my torment.”

“No, depart into everlasting fire. There burn without consuming, and be tormented without end.”

“But, Lord, grant me,” cries the poor wretch, “at least the mitigation of friendly, entertaining, and sympathizing company. Or, if this cannot be granted, grant me this small, this almost no request, to be doomed to some solitary corner in hell, where I shall be punished only by my own conscience and Thine immediate hand. But, oh, deliver me from these malicious, tormenting devils! Banish me into some apartment in the infernal pit far from their society.”

“No, depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Thou must [be] one of their wretched crew forever. Thou didst join with them in sinning and now must share in their punishment...”

SENTENCE BEING PRONOUNCED, IT IS IMMEDIATELY EXECUTED. “These shall go away into everlasting punishment” (Mat 25:46)...to the pit...There they are confined in chains of darkness and in a lake burning with fire and brimstone forever—*forever!* In that dreadful word lies the emphasis of torment: it is a hell in hell. If they might be but released from pain, though it were by annihilation after they have wept away ten thousand millions of ages in extremity of pain, it would be some mitigation,⁴³ some encouragement. But, alas! When as many millions of ages are passed as the stars of heaven or the sands on the seashore or the atoms of dust in this huge globe of earth, their punishment is as far from an end as when the sentence was pronounced upon them. *Forever!* There is no exhausting of that word. When it is affixed to the highest degree of misery, the terror of the sound is utterly insupportable. See, sirs, what depends upon time, that span of time we may enjoy in this fleeting life. Eternity! Awful, all-important eternity depends upon it.

All this while, conscience tears the sinner’s heart with the most tormenting reflections. “Oh what a fair opportunity I once had for salvation, had I improved it! I was warned of the consequences of a life of sin and carelessness. I was told of the necessity of faith, repentance, and universal holiness of heart and life. I enjoyed a sufficient space for repentance and all the necessary means of salvation. But fool that I was, I neglected all, I abused all. I refused to part with my sins. I refused to engage seriously in religion and to seek God in ear-nest. And now I am lost forever without hope. Oh! For one of those months, one of those weeks, or even so much as one of those days or hours I once trifled away! With what earnestness, with what solicitude⁴⁴ would I improve it! But all my opportunities are past, beyond recovery, and not a moment shall be given me for this purpose any more. O what a fool I was to sell my soul for such trifles! To set so light by heaven and fall into hell through mere neglect and carelessness!”

Ye impenitent,⁴⁵ unthinking sinners, though you may now be able to silence or drown the clamors of your consciences, yet the time—or rather the dread eternity—is coming when they will speak in spite of you, when they will speak home⁴⁶ and be felt by the most hardened and remorseless heart. Therefore, regard their warnings *now* while they may be the means of your recovery.

You and I...are concerned in the solemn transaction of the Day I have been describing. You and I shall either be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye; or while moldering in the grave, we shall hear the voice of the Son of God and come forth, either to the resurrection of life or to the resurrection of damnation (Joh 5:28-29). And which, my brethren, shall be our doom? Can we foreknow it at this distance of time? I proposed it to your inquiry already, whether you have any good reason to hope you shall be of that happy number who shall rise to life? Now I propose it again with this counterpart: Have you any evidence to hope you shall not be of that wretched, numerous multitude who shall rise to damnation? If there be any inquiry within the compass of human knowledge that demands your solicitous⁴⁷ thoughts, certainly it is this.

From “The General Resurrection” in *Sermons of the Rev. Samuel Davies*, Vol. 1, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria, a ministry of Reformation Heritage Books, www.heritagebooks.org

⁴² **transient** – lasting a very short time; short-lived.

⁴³ **mitigation** – lessening of the intensity or pain.

⁴⁴ **solicitude** – earnestness; carefulness.

⁴⁵ **impenitent** – not feeling shame or regret about one’s actions or attitudes; not repentant.

⁴⁶ **speak home** – that which strikes home; to the heart.

⁴⁷ **solicitous** – attentive; careful.

Samuel Davies (1723-1761): Presbyterian minister; fourth president of Princeton and preacher during the Great Awakening; born near Summit Ridge, New Castle County, Delaware.

What is needed today is a Scriptural setting forth of the character of God—His absolute sovereignty, His ineffable holiness, His inflexible justice, His unchanging veracity. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the condition of the natural man—his total depravity, his spiritual insensibility, his inveterate hostility to God, the fact that he is “condemned already” and that the wrath of a sin-hating God is even now abiding upon him. What is needed today is a Scriptural setting forth of the alarming danger in which sinners are—the indescribably awful doom which awaits them, the fact that if they follow only a little further their present course they shall most certainly suffer the due reward of their iniquities. What is needed today is a Scriptural setting forth of the nature of that punishment which awaits the lost—the awfulness of it, the hopelessness of it, the unendurableness of it, the endlessness of it.—*A. W. Pink*

THE TORMENTS OF LOSS

Thomas Boston (1676-1732)

“Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”—Matthew 25:41

THE PUNISHMENT OF LOSS THAT THE DAMNED SHALL UNDERGO IS SEPARATION FROM THE LORD. We learn [this] from the text...They shall be eternally separated from God and Christ. Christ is the way to the Father; but the way to them shall be everlast-ingly blocked up, the bridge shall be drawn, and the great gulf fixed. [Then] shall they be shut up in a state of eternal separation from God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. They will be locally separated from the Man Christ and shall never come into the seat of the blessed, where He appears in His glory. [They will] be cast out into outer darkness (Mat 22:13). They cannot indeed be locally separated from God, [for] they cannot be in a place where He is not. He is and will be present everywhere: “If I make my bed in hell,” says the Psalmist, “behold thou art there” (Psa 139:8). But they shall be miserable beyond expression in a *relative* separation from God. Though He will be present in the very center of their souls, if I may so express it, while they are wrapped up in fiery flames in outer darkness, it shall only be to feed them with...His wrath and to punish them with the emanations⁴⁸ of His revenging justice. They shall never more taste of His goodness and bounty nor have the least glimpse of hope from Him. They will see His heart to be absolutely alienated from them and that it cannot be towards them. [They will see] that they are the party against whom the Lord will have indignation forever. They shall be deprived of the glorious presence and enjoyment of God. They shall have no part in the beatific vision⁴⁹ nor see anything in God towards them, but one wave of wrath rolling after another. This will bring upon them overwhelming floods of sorrow forevermore. They shall never taste of the rivers of pleasures that the saints in heav-en enjoy, but shall have an everlasting winter and a perpetual night because the Sun of righteousness has departed from them. They are left in outer darkness. So great as heaven’s happiness is, so great will be their loss. They can have none of it forever.

This separation of the wicked from God will be 1. *An involuntary separation.* Now they depart from Him; they will not come to Him, though they are called and entreated to come. Then they shall be driven away from Him, when they would gladly abide with Him...2. *It will be a total and utter separation...* There shall be a total separation, the damned being cast into utter darkness, where there will not be the least gleam of light and favor from the Lord...3. *It shall be a final separation.* They will part with Him...being shut up under everlasting horror and despair...Never shall one message of favor or goodwill go between [Jesus Christ and them] anymore.

This punishment of loss in a total and final separation from God is a misery beyond what mortals can conceive and which only the dreadful experience of the damned can sufficiently unfold. But that we may have some conception of the horror of it, let these following things be considered:

(1) God is the chief good. Therefore, to be separated from Him must be the chief evil...God being the chief good and no good comparable to Him, there can be no loss as great as the loss of God. The full enjoyment of Him is the

⁴⁸ **emanations** – flowings forth.

⁴⁹ **beatific vision** – sight of the glories of heaven.

highest pinnacle of happiness the creature is capable of arriving at. To be separated fully and finally from Him must then be the lowest step of misery that the rational creature can be reduced to...What must it then be to be rejected of God, of goodness itself?

(2) **God is the fountain of all goodness.** From [Him], all goodness flows unto the creatures and...is continued in them and to them. Whatever goodness or perfection, natural as well as moral, is in any creature, it is from God...Wherefore, a total separation from God, wherein all comfortable communication between God and a rational creature is absolutely blocked up must of necessity bring along with it a total eclipse of all light of comfort and ease whatsoever...Our Lord tells us, "There is none good but one, that is, God" (Mat 19:17). Nothing good or comfortable is originally from the creature. Whatever good or comfortable thing one finds in one's self, as health of body [or] peace of mind; whatever sweetness, rest, pleasure, or delight one finds in other creatures, as in meat, drink, arts, and sciences—all these are but some faint rays of Divine perfections, communicated from God unto the creature. [These depend] on a constant influence from Him for their conservation, which failing, they would immediately be gone. For it is impossible that any created thing can be to us more or better than what God makes it to be. All the rivulets of comfort we drink, within or without ourselves, come from God as their springhead...Thus, in their separation from God, all peace is removed far away from them, and pain in body and anguish of soul succeed to it. All joy goes, and unmixed sorrow settles in them. All quiet and rest separate from them, and they are filled with horror and rage. Hope flies away, and despair seizes them. Common operations of the Spirit, which now restrain them, are withdrawn forever, and *sin comes to its utmost height*. Thus, we have a dismal view of the horrible spectacle of sin and misery, which a creature proves when totally separated from God and left to itself. We may see this separation to be the very hell of hell.

Being separated from God, they are deprived of *all* good. The good things that they set their hearts upon in this world are beyond their reach there. The covetous man cannot enjoy his wealth there, the ambitious man his honors, nor the sensual man his pleasures—no, not a drop of water to cool his tongue (Luk 16:24-25). No meat or drink there to strengthen the faint; no sleep to refresh the weary; no music or pleasant company to comfort and cheer up the sorrowful. As for those good things they despised in the world, they shall never more hear of them nor see them. No [calls to] Christ there—no pardon, no peace, no wells of salvation in the pit of destruction. In one word, they shall be deprived of whatever might comfort them, being totally and finally separated from God, the Fountain of all goodness and comfort.

(3) **Man naturally desires to be happy.** Being conscious...that he is not self-sufficient, he has ever a desire of something [outside] himself to make him happy. The soul being by its natural make and constitution capable of enjoying God and nothing else being [proportional] to its desires, it can never have true and solid rest until it rests in the enjoyment of God. The rational nature can never lay aside this desire of happiness, no, not in hell. Now, while the wicked are on earth, they seek their satisfaction in [created things]. When one fails, they go to another. Thus they spend their time in the world, deceiving their own souls with vain hopes. But in the other world, all comfort in the creatures failing and the shadows that they are now pursuing vanished in a moment, they shall be totally and finally separated from God and *see they have thus lost Him*...This will create unspeakable anguish: they shall live under an eternal, gnawing hunger after happiness that they certainly know shall never be in the least measure satisfied, all doors being closed on them. Who then can imagine how this separation from God shall cut the damned to the heart? How they will roar and rage under it? How it will sting and gnaw them through the ages of eternity?

(4) **The damned shall know that some are perfectly happy in the enjoyment of that God from Whom they themselves are separated.** This will aggravate the sense of their loss: they can never have any share with those happy ones. Being separated from God, they are separated from the society of the glorified saints and angels...We have ground from the Word to conclude that the damned shall have a very exquisite knowledge of the happiness of the saints in heaven. What else can be meant of the rich man in hell seeing Lazarus in Abraham's bosom? One thing is plain: in this case, their own torments will give them such notions of the happiness of the saints as a sick man has of health or a prisoner has of liberty. And as they cannot fail of reflecting on the happiness of those in heaven without any hope of attaining to contentment with their own lot, so every thought of that happiness will aggravate their loss...

(5) **They will remember that time was when they might have been made partakers of the blessed company of saints in their enjoyment of God.** This will aggravate their sense of the loss...Despisers of the Gospel will remember with bitterness that Jesus Christ with all His benefits was [preached] to them; that they were exhorted,

entreated, and pressed to [believe], but would not; and that they were warned of the misery they feel and exhorted to flee from the wrath to come—but they would not hearken. The Gospel...slighted will make a hot hell...

(6) They will see the loss to be irrecoverable: that they must eternally lie under it, never, never to be repaired. Might the damned, after millions of ages in hell, regain what they have lost, it would be some ground of hope. But the prize is gone and can never be recovered. Two things will pierce them to the heart: 1. that they never knew the worth of it until it was irrecoverably lost...2. that they have lost it for dross and dung...They have lost heaven for earthly profits and pleasures, and now both are gone together from them. The drunkard's cups are gone, the covetous man's gain, the voluptuous man's carnal delights, and the sluggard's ease: nothing is left to comfort them now. The happiness they lost remains indeed, but they can have no part in it forever.

From "Of Hell" in *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston*, Vol. 8, reprinted by Tentmaker Publishing, www.tentmaker.org.uk.

Thomas Boston (1676-1732): Scottish Presbyterian minister and scholar; his complete works are in twenty-two volumes; born in Duns, Berwickshire.

THE TORMENTS OF SOUL

Edward Payson (1783-1827)

"Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."—Mark 9:44

A MINISTER, my hearers, who would be faithful, must frequently compare his preaching with the Scriptures and inquire, not only whether he preaches the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, but whether he gives to every particular doctrine and precept just that place in his sermons that its importance deserves or that is given to it in the Word of God. On instituting such an inquiry, I find that it is long since I called your attention, particularly, to the punishment that awaits impenitent sinners in a future state...In a word, the doctrine of future punishment has not filled of late such a place in my sermons as it fills in the Bible, as it fills in the discourses of our great Teacher, Jesus Christ. I therefore [believe it my] duty to call your attention to the subject, painful as it is. Some of you may, perhaps, say—or at least think—that it will do no good...It is my duty, not to decide what doctrines are likely to do good, but to preach such doctrines as I find in the Scriptures; not to determine what means will prove effectual, but to use those means that God has appointed...I dare not pretend to be either more wise or more compassionate than our Savior. He thought it consistent both with wisdom and with compassion to utter the words of our text. And He evidently uttered them with a view to alarm His hearers...

There can be no doubt, I think, that in these expressions our Savior alludes to the manner in which the Jews disposed of the bodies of the dead. Sometimes, as is the custom with us, they placed them in tombs, where worms, of course, consumed them. At others, they prepared a funeral pile on which the body was placed in order to be consumed by fire...But there is another death, which is followed by consequences far more terrible, which affect not the body only, but the soul. Those who die this death shall be preyed upon by worms that will never die and become the fuel of a fire that will never be quenched. They will be forever dying, forever suffering the pangs of the second death, but will never die, never cease to exist. It will be as if the bodies, which you have seen entombed or burnt, could feel the worms that devour or the fires that consume them...Let us then, with feelings similar to those that prompted Him to utter this language, lift the veil of figurative expression and contemplate the awful truths, which it partly discloses and partly conceals.

In dilating upon⁵⁰ these truths, I shall say little of the corporeal⁵¹ sufferings that await impenitent sinners beyond the grave. Such sufferings will certainly compose a part of their punishment. We are assured that their bodies shall come forth to the resurrection of damnation. Our Savior's language respecting the rich man who in

⁵⁰ **dilating upon** – discussing and expanding.

⁵¹ **corporeal** – bodily.

hell lifted up his eyes, being in torments, more than intimates that anguish of body was an ingredient in his wretchedness. Indeed, as the body is the servant of the soul—at once its tempter to many sins and its instrument in committing them—there seems to be a manifest propriety⁵² in making them companions in punishment. We shall only add that as after the resurrection the bodies of the wicked will be immortal, they will be capable of enduring suffering that in this world would cause instant death.

Though we know little because the Scriptures say little of the nature of their bodies or of the miseries that await them, it is otherwise with respect to the sufferings of the soul. To these sufferings, the declarations of Scripture seem principally to refer...What is the gnawing worm, which is to prey upon the soul hereafter? I answer,

1. Its own passions and desires. That these are capable of preying upon the soul and occasioning even in this life most acute suffering, those of you whose passions are naturally strong need not be informed. Those of you whose passions are less violent, whose tempers are comparatively mild, may be convinced of the same truth by seeing the effects of passion upon others. Look, for instance, at a man who is habitually peevish,⁵³ fretful, and discontented. Has he not gnawing worms already at his heart? Look at the envious man, whose cheek turns pale and who feels a secret pang when he hears a rival commended or sees him successful. Is there no gnawing worm in his bos-om? Look at the covetous man, who wears himself out in the pursuit of wealth and who is daily harassed by craving desires, cares, and anx-ieties. Can any worm gnaw worse than these can? Look at the votary⁵⁴ of ambition, whose success depends on the favor of the great or of the multitude, who pants to rise, but is kept down by a rival or by adverse circumstances. [His] mind is full of contrivances, jealousies, and rivalships—is there no corroding tooth at work in his breast? Look at the proud man, whose blood boils at every real or fancied neglect; at the passionate or revengeful man, who has always some quarrel upon his hands; at the drunkard, whose passions are inflamed by intoxicating potions, and you will find fresh proofs of this truth.

It is true, indeed, that none of these passions make men completely wretched in this world, and the reasons why they do not are obvious. In the first place, there are in this world many things that are calculated to soothe or, at least, to divert men's passions. Sometimes they meet with success, and this produces, at least, a transient⁵⁵ calm. At another time, the objects that excite their passions are absent; and this allows them a little quietness. There are so many things to be attended to that men have not always leisure to indulge their passions or attend to the uneasiness that they produce. Above all, they are from their infancy under the operation of causes that tend to restrain their passions and weaken, or at least confine, their rage. Besides, every man must sleep at intervals; and while he sleeps, his passions are at rest.

But suppose all these things to be removed. Suppose a man to be deprived of sleep and chained down with nothing to do but to feel his passions rage continually. Suppose him to meet with no success, nothing to soothe his ruffled feelings. Suppose the objects that excite his strongest passions to be constantly before him. Finally, suppose all outward and inward restraints to be taken off. Would not such a man be, even in this life, inconceivably wretched? Yet even his wretch-edness would be nothing, compared with that which the sinner's passions and desires will occasion him in a future state. There his passions, which are now in their infancy, will start up into giant strength. There all outward and inward restraints will be taken off. There he will have nothing to divert his attention, nothing to assist him in forgetting, even for a moment, his tormenting feelings. There every object that he ever desired will be removed from him forever, while the desire will remain...in vastly increased force. There he will be surrounded with malicious, cruel, raging companions, who will continually blow up his passions to the highest pitch of fury. There not even the respite,⁵⁶ which sleep now affords, will be found. Nor is this all. Nothing inflames the passions of men more than suffering. Even men who are at other times good-tempered often become impatient, discontented, and even angry when harassed by severe pain, long sickness, or repeated disappointments. How terribly, then, will the passions of sinners be enraged by the exquisite, hopeless sufferings of a future state! How they will curse themselves and all around them, and, as the Scriptures declare, blaspheme God because of their plagues. Against Him and against all good beings, they will feel the most furious, implacable hostility; for they will be entirely under the dominion of that carnal mind, which is enmity against Jehovah.

⁵² **manifest propriety** – clear-to-the-mind rightness or appropriateness.

⁵³ **peevish** – irritable.

⁵⁴ **votary** – devoted follower.

⁵⁵ **transient** – lasting a very short time; fleeting.

⁵⁶ **respite** – a short period of rest or relief.

In addition, the Scriptures teach us that they will see, though afar off and with an impassable gulf between them, the happiness of the righteous; and this sight will occasion envy, compared with which all the envious feelings ever entertained on earth are nothing. Every sinner too will find in the regions of despair some whom his arguments, his solicitations, or at least his example helped to bring there. And they will overwhelm him and enrage his passions with the bitterest reproaches. Nor will sinners there retain the least shadow of those natural affections or amiable dispositions that some of them possess here. For our Savior declares that from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have. Now consider all these things and say, “Who can describe or conceive of the misery that sinners will suffer from their own gnawing passions, or the blasphemies, the execrations,⁵⁷ the wild uproar, the raging madness that will be witnessed when all the wicked from all ages and parts of the world are imprisoned together in the blackness of darkness like rav-enous lions in their dens!” To this God refers when He says of sinners, “They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind” (Hos 8:7); that is, they have indulged sinful passions in this life; and those passions, blown up as from a wind to a whirlwind, shall be their future companions and tormentors.

2. The gnawing worm of which our Savior speaks includes the consciences of sinners. The sufferings inflicted by conscience will be even more painful than those that are occasioned by the sinner’s passions; for as terrible as are the gnawings of passion, those of conscience are still more so. Her scourge draws blood at every stroke. Even in this world, she has drawn many, as she did Judas, to despair, madness, and suicide. But her loudest rebukes, her keenest reproaches here, are mere whispers compared with the thundering voice in which she will speak hereafter. Here she speaks only at intervals. There she will speak without intermission. Here the sinner has various ways of stifling her reproaches or diverting his attention from them. He may rush into scenes of business or amusement; he may silence her with sophistical⁵⁸ arguments and excuses or with promises of future amendment. When all other means fail, he may drown her for a season in the intoxicating bowl as too many, alas, madly do.

But there, he will have no means of silencing or escaping from her reproaches for a moment. Here she knows comparatively little of God, of duty, or of sin, and therefore often suffers the sinner to escape when she ought to scourge him. But there she will see everything in the clear light of eternity, and in consequence, instead of a whip of small cords, will chastise the sinner as with a scourge of scorpions. There the sinner will clearly see what a God he has offended, what a Savior he has neglected, what a heaven he has lost, and into what a hell he has plunged himself. All the sins that he has committed, with all their aggravations and consequences; all the Sabbaths he enjoyed, the sermons that he heard, the warnings and [Gospel calls] that he slighted, the opportunities that he misimproved, the serious impressions that he banished will be set in order before him and overwhelm him with mountains of conscious guilt.

And O, the keen unutterable pangs of remorse, the bitter self-reproaches, the unavailing regrets, the fruitless wishes that he had pursued a different course that will be thus excited in his breast! The word *remorse* is derived from a Latin word that signifies “to gnaw again” or “to gnaw repeatedly.” Surely, no term can more properly describe the sufferings that are inflicted by an accusing conscience. Well then may such a conscience, when its now sleeping energies shall be awakened by the light of eternity, be compared to a gnawing worm...Even in this world, where conscience is comparatively weak, I have often seen the bed and the whole chamber of the sick man shake under the almost convulsive agonies that her lash inflicted. I have been told by persons suffering under most painful diseases that their bodily sufferings were nothing to the anguish of mind that they endured. I have seen a man of robust constitution, vigorous health, strong mind, and liberal education tremble like an aspen leaf and scarcely able to sustain himself under the pressure of conscious guilt and pungent⁵⁹ remorse. A man in similar circumstances has been known to rise in winter at midnight and run for miles with naked feet over the rough and frozen ground, in order that the bodily pain thus occasioned might, if possible, divert his attention for a time from the far more intolerable anguish of his mind. And a dying infidel has been known to exclaim, “Surely there is a God, for nothing less than omnipotence could inflict the pangs which I now feel!” What then must be the pangs inflicted by a gnawing conscience in eternity!

OUR SAVIOR SPEAKS NOT ONLY OF A GNAWING WORM, BUT ALSO OF AN UNQUENCHABLE FIRE. What reference this may have to the corporeal sufferings of the wicked, I shall not pretend to decide. But it appears evident, from other passages, that as far as the soul is concerned it refers to a keen and constant sense of God’s presence and

⁵⁷ **execrations** – curses.

⁵⁸ **sophistical** – believable, but misleading.

⁵⁹ **pungent** – keenly painful.

righteous displeasure. He says..., “The LORD thy God is a consuming fire” (Deu 4:24; Heb 12:29) and “a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell” (Deu 32:22). These expressions evidently intimate that a view of His perfections and constant presence, combined with a sense of His displeasure, will affect the soul as fire does the body, withering its strength and drying up its spirits. Some of you have formerly known a little of this; and you know, or at least will easily conceive, that no fire can torture the body more keenly than a sense of God’s displeasure does the soul...What then must it be to see yourselves surrounded by a just and holy God, to meet His heart-searching, heart-withering eye, wherever you turn, fixed full upon you. [What must it be] to see the Author of your being, the Sov-ereign of the universe, the great, the glorious, the majestic, the omnipotent, the infinite Jehovah, regarding you with severe displeasure! [What must it be] to see His anger burning against you like fire! O, this will be indeed a fire to the soul! A fire that will be felt in all its faculties and fill them to the brim with anguish—anguish as much greater than any which could be occasioned by material fire, as the Creator is superior to His creatures. It is then, O, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God—that God Who is a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity!

From “The Punishment of the Wicked Dreadful and Interminable” in *The Works of Edward Payson*, Vol. 3, reprinted by Sprinkle Publications, www.sprinklepublications.net.

Edward Payson (1783-1827): American Congregational preacher; born in Rindge, New Hampshire, USA.

THE TORMENTS OF SENSE

Thomas Boston (1676-1732)

BURNING is the most terrible punishment and brings the most exquisite pain and torment with it...All imaginable pleasures on earth will never prevail with the most voluptuous⁶⁰ man to venture to lodge but one half-hour in a burning fiery furnace nor would all the wealth in the world prevail with the most covetous to do it. Yet on much lower terms do most men, in effect, expose themselves to everlasting fire in hell, which is more vehement⁶¹ and terrible than any fire we on earth are acquainted with. [This] will appear by the following considerations:

(1) **As in heaven, grace being brought to its perfection, profit and pleasure also arrive at their height there; so sin, being come to its height in hell, the evil of punishment also arrives at its perfection there.** Wherefore, as the joys of heaven are far greater than any joys that the saints obtain on earth, so the punishments of hell must be greater than any earthly torments whatever...

(2) **Why are the things of another world represented to us in an earthly dress...?** The weakness of our capacities in such matters, which the Lord is pleased to condescend unto, requires it. It [is] always supposed that the things of the other world are in their kind more perfect than those by which they are represented...When therefore we hear of *hellfire*, it is necessary [that] we understand by it something more vehement, piercing, and tormenting than any fire ever seen by our eyes...Hell-torments are represented under the notion of fire, which the damned are cast into. A dreadful representation indeed!...We hear also of “the second death” (Rev 20:6), for the damned in hell shall be ever dying; of the “wine-press of the wrath of God” (Rev 14:19), wherein they will be trodden in anger, trampled in the Lord’s fury (Isa 63:3)—pressed, broken, and bruised without end; “the worm that dieth not” (Mar 9:44), which shall eternally gnaw them; “a bottomless pit,” where they will be ever sinking (Rev 20:3). It is not simply called “a fire,” but “the lake of fire and brimstone” (20:10), “a lake of fire burning with brimstone” (19:20)—one can imagine nothing more dreadful. Yet, because fire gives light, and light, as Solomon observes (Ecc 11:7), is sweet, there is no light there, but darkness—*utter darkness* (Mat 25:30). They must have an everlasting night, since nothing can be there that is in any measure comfortable or refreshing.

⁶⁰ **voluptuous** – addicted to sensual pleasure.

⁶¹ **vehement** – intense.

(3) **Our fire cannot affect a spirit but by way of sympathy with the body to which it is united.** But hellfire will not only pierce into the bodies, but directly into the souls of the damned. For it is “prepared for the devil and his angels,” those wicked spirits whom no fire on earth can hurt...How vehement must that fire be that pierces directly into the soul and makes an everlasting burning in the spirit, the most lively and tender part of a man wherein wounds or pains are most intolerable!

(4) **The preparation of this fire proves the inexpressible vehemency and dreadfulness of it.** The text calls it “prepared” fire, yea, the prepared fire by way of eminence.⁶² The three children were not cast into ordinary fire, but a fire *prepared* for a particular purpose. Therefore, [it] was exceeding hot, the furnace being heated seven times more than ordinary (Dan 3:19-22). [Likewise,] the damned shall find in hell a prepared fire, the like to which was never prepared by human art. It is a fire of God’s own preparing, the product of infinite wisdom with a particular purpose: to demonstrate the most strict and severe divine justice against sin...As the things He has prepared for them that love Him are great and good beyond expression or conception, so one may conclude that the things He has prepared against those who hate Him are great and terrible beyond what men can either say or think of them...Nay, God Himself will be a consuming fire to the damned (Deu 4:2). [He will be] intimately present as a devouring fire in the souls and bodies. It is a fearful thing to fall into a fire or to be shut up in a fiery furnace on earth. But the terror of these vanishes when we consider how fearful it is to fall into the hands of the living God, which is the lot of the damned. “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” (Isa 33:14).

THE PROPERTIES OF THE FIERY TORMENTS IN HELL:

(1) **They will be universal torments, every part of the creature being tormented in that flame.** When one is cast into a fiery furnace, the fire makes its way into the very heart and leaves no member untouched. What part then can have ease, when the damned [are immersed] in a lake of fire burning with brimstone? There will their bodies be tormented and scorched forever. As they sinned, so shall they be tormented in all the parts thereof...What soundness or ease can be to any part of that body, which, being separated from God and all refreshment from Him, is still in the pangs of the second death—*ever dying, but never dead*? But as the soul was chief in sinning, it will be chief in suffering too, being filled quite full of the wrath of a sin-avenging God. The damned shall be ever under the deepest impressions of God’s vindictive justice against them. This fire will melt their souls within them like wax. Who knows the power of that wrath that had such an effect on the Mediator standing in the room of sinners, “My heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels” (Psa 22:14)? Their minds shall be filled with the terrible apprehensions of God’s implacable⁶³ wrath; and whatever they can think upon—past, present, or to come—will aggravate their torment and anguish. Their will shall be crossed in all things for evermore. As their will was ever contrary to the will of God’s precepts, so God in His dealing with them in the other world shall have war with their will forever. What they would have, they shall not in the least obtain; but what they would not shall be bound upon them without remedy. Hence, no pleasant affection shall *ever* spring up in their hearts anymore. Their love of complacency,⁶⁴ joy, and delight in any object whatever shall be plucked up by the root. They will be filled with hatred, fury, and rage against God, themselves, and their fellow creatures, whether happy in heaven or miserable in hell, as they themselves are. They will be sunk in sorrow, racked with anxiety, tilled with horror, galled to the heart with fretting, and continually darted with despair.⁶⁵ [This] will make them weep, gnash their teeth, and blaspheme forever. “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat 22:13)...Con-science will be a worm to gnaw and prey upon them. Remorse for their sins shall seize them and torment them forever; and they shall not be able to shake it off as they once did...Their memory will serve but to aggravate their torment and every new reflection will bring another pang of anguish. “But Abraham said,” to the rich man in hell, “Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things” (Luk 16:25).

(2) **The torments in hell are manifold.** [Imagine] that, at one and the same time, a man were under the violence of...whatever diseases and pains have ever met together in one body. The torment of such a one would be but light in comparison with the torments of the damned. For as in hell there is an absence of all that is good and desirable, so there is the confluence⁶⁶ of all evils there, since all the effects of sin and of the curse take their place in it after

⁶² **by way of eminence** – rising above others.

⁶³ **implacable** – impossible to reduce in strength or force.

⁶⁴ **complacency** – pleasure.

⁶⁵ **darted with despair** – pierced with hopelessness.

⁶⁶ **confluence** – merging; flowing together.

the Last Judgment... There they will find a prison they can never escape out of; a lake of fire where they will be ever [immersed] and burning; a pit whereof they will never find a bottom...The fire that is not quenched shall devour them as dead bodies that are burned. Their eyes shall be kept in blackness of darkness without the least comfortable gleam of light. Their ears [shall be] filled with frightful yellings of the infernal crew. They shall taste nothing but the sharpness of God's wrath, the dregs of the cup of His fury. The stench of the burning lake of brimstone will be the smell there; and they shall feel extreme pains for evermore.

(3) They will be most exquisite and vehement torments, causing "weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth" (Mat 13:42; 22:13). They are represented to us under the notion of pangs in travail, which are very sharp and exquisite. So says the rich man in hell, "I am tormented" (Luke 16:24)...Ah dreadful pangs! Horrible travail, in which both soul and body are in pangs together! Helpless travail, hopeless and endless!...Some have endured grievous tortures on earth with surprising obstinacy and undaunted courage, but men's courage will fail them there when they find themselves fallen into the hands of the living God. No escape to be expected forever. It is true, there will be degrees of torments in hell: "It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, than for Chorazin and Bethsaida" (Mat 11:21-22). But the least load of wrath there will be unsupportable, for how can the heart of the creature endure or his hands be strong when God Himself is a consuming fire to him? When the tares are bound in bundles for the fire, there will be bundles of covetous persons, drunkards, profane swearers, unclean persons, formal hypocrites, unbelievers, despisers of the Gospel, and the like. The several bundles being cast into hellfire, some will burn more vehemently than others will, according as their sins have been more heinous than those of others...

(4) They will be uninterrupted. There is no intermission there, no ease, no, not for a moment. They "shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev 20:10). Few are so tossed in this world, but sometimes they get rest; but the damned shall get none. They took their rest in the time appointed of God for their labor. Storms are rarely seen without some space between showers; but there is no intermission in the storm that falls on the wicked in hell. There, deep will be calling unto deep, and the waves of wrath continually rolling over them. There, the heavens will be always black to them, and they shall have a perpetual night, but no rest there: "They have no rest day nor night" (Rev 14:11).

(5) They will be unpitied. The punishments inflicted on the greatest malefactors on earth draw forth some compassion from the spectators; but the damned shall have none to pity them. God will not pity them, but laugh at their calamity (Pro 1:26). The blessed company in heaven shall rejoice in the execution of God's righteous judgment and sing while the smoke riseth up forever and ever: "And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever" (Rev 19:3). No compassion can be expected from the devil and his angels, who delight in the ruin of the children of men, and are and will be forever void of pity. Neither will one pity another there, where everyone is weeping and gnashing his teeth under his own insupportable anguish and pain. There, natural affection will be extinguished: parents will not love their children, nor children their parents; the mother will not pity the daughter in these flames, nor will the daughter pity the mother; the son will shew no regard to his father there, nor the servant to his master—everyone will be groaning under his own torment.

(6) To complete their misery, their torments shall be eternal. "And the smoke of their torments ascendeth up for ever and ever" (Rev 14:11). Ah! What a frightful case is this: to be tormented in the whole body and soul, and that not with one kind of torment, but many—all of these most exquisite—and all this without any intermission and without pity from any! What heart can conceive those things without horror? Nevertheless, if this most miserable case were at length to have an end, that would afford *some* comfort. But the torments of the damned will have no end.

From "Of Hell" in *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston*, Vol. 8, reprinted by Tentmaker Publishing, www.tentmaker.org.uk.

O the madness of many men in the world, that they will rather lose a God than lose a lust, than leave their whore, than forsake their profit that comes in by unjust gain.—*Christopher Love*

EXHORTATION TO ESCAPE HELL

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

WE may learn the folly and madness of the greater part of mankind in that for the sake of present, momentary gratification, they run the venture of enduring all these eternal torments. They prefer a small pleasure, a little wealth, or a little earthly honor and greatness that can last but for a moment to an escape from this punishment. If it be true that the torments of hell are eternal, “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mar 8:37)...Eternal misery, though they lie every day exposed to it, is a thing neglected...And if they do take pains for a little while, they soon leave off: something else takes up their thoughts and concern.

Thus you see it among young and old. Multitudes of youth lead a careless life, taking little care about their salvation. So you may see it among persons of middle age and with many advanced in years, when they certainly draw near to the grave...How strange is it that men can enjoy themselves and be at rest when they are thus hanging over eternal burnings. At the same time...not knowing how soon the thread by which they hang will break, nor indeed do they pretend to know. And if it breaks, *they are gone, they are lost forever, and there is no remedy!*...

I shall improve this subject in a use of exhortation to sinners to take care to escape these eternal torments. If they be eternal, one would think that would be enough to awaken your concern and excite your diligence. If the punishment be eternal, it is infinite, as we said before. Therefore, no other evil, no death, no temporary torment that you ever heard of or that you can imagine is anything in comparison with it...Therefore here,

(1) Be entreated to consider attentively how great and awful a thing eternity is...Do but consider what it is to suffer extreme torment forever and ever; to suffer it day and night, from one year to another, from one age to another, from one thousand ages to another, and so adding age to age and thousands to thousands, in pain, in wailing and lamenting, groaning and shrieking, and gnashing your teeth; with your souls full of dreadful grief and amazement, with your bodies and every member full of racking [pain] without any possibility of getting ease; without any possibility of moving God to pity by your cries; without any possibility of hiding yourselves from Him; without any possibility of diverting your thoughts from your pain; without any possibility of obtaining any manner of mitigation, help, or change for the better.

(2) Do but consider how dreadful despair will be in such torment. How dismal will it be, when you are under these racking torments, to know assuredly that you never, never shall be delivered from them; to have no hope. When you shall wish that you might be turned into nothing, but shall have no hope of it; when you shall wish that you might be turned into...a serpent, but shall have no hope of it; when you would rejoice, if you might but have any relief, after you shall have endured these torments millions of ages, but shall have no hope of it. After you shall have worn out the age of the sun, moon, and stars in your dolorous⁶⁷ groans and lamentations, without rest day and night or one minute's ease, yet you shall have no hope of ever being delivered. After you shall have worn a thousand more such ages, you shall have no hope, but shall know that you are not one whit nearer to the end of your torments—but that still there are the same groans, the same shrieks, the same doleful cries, incessantly to be made by you and that the smoke of your torment shall still ascend up forever and ever. Your souls, which shall have been agitated with the wrath of God all this while, will still exist to bear more wrath. Your bodies, which shall have been burning all this while in these glowing flames, shall not have been consumed but will remain to [burn] through eternity, which will not have been at all shortened by what shall have been past...The more the damned in hell think of the eternity of their torments, the more amazing will it appear to them. Alas! They will not be able to keep it out of their minds. Their tortures will not divert them from it but will fix their attention to it. O how dreadful will eternity appear to them after they shall have been thinking on it for ages together and shall have so long an experience of their torments! The damned in hell will have two infinites perpetually to amaze them and swallow them up: One is an infinite God, Whose wrath they will bear and in Whom they will behold their perfect and irreconcilable enemy. The other is the infinite duration of their torment.

A man in his present state, without any enlargement of his capacity, would have a vastly more lively impression of eternity than he has, if he were only under some pretty sharp pain in some member of his body and were at the

⁶⁷ **dolorous** – showing great sorrow or distress.

same time assured that he must endure that pain forever. His pain would give him a greater sense of eternity than other men have. How much more will those excruciating torments that the damned will suffer have this effect!...O be entreated, ye that are in a Christless state and are going on in a way to hell, that are daily exposed to damnation, to consider these things. If you do not, it will surely be but a little while before you will experience them, and then you will know how dreadful it is to despair in hell. It may be before this year, this month, or this week is at an end, before another Sabbath or ever you shall have opportunity to hear another sermon.

(3) That you may effectually escape these dreadful and eternal torments, be entreated to flee and embrace Him Who came into the world for the very end of saving sinners from these torments. [Jesus Christ] has paid the whole debt due to the divine Law and exhausted eternal [sufferings] in temporal sufferings. What great encouragement it is—to those of you who are sensible that you are exposed to eternal punishment—that there is a Savior provided, Who is able and Who freely [saves sinners] from that punishment in a way that is perfectly consistent with the glory of God—yea, [in a way] *that is more to the glory of God than it would be if you should suffer the eternal punishment of hell*. For if you should suffer that punishment, you would never pay the whole of the debt. Those who are sent to hell never will have paid the whole of the debt that they owe to God, nor indeed a part that bears any proportion to the whole...Justice therefore never can be actually satisfied in your damnation, but it is actually satisfied in Christ. Therefore, He is accepted of the Father, and all who believe are accepted and justified in Him. Therefore, believe in Him, come to Him, commit your souls to Him to be saved by Him. In Him, you shall be safe from the eternal torments of hell. Nor is that all: but through Him, you shall inherit inconceivable blessedness and glory that will be of equal duration with the torments of hell. For as at the Last Day the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, so shall the righteous, or those who trust in Christ, go into life eternal.

From “The Eternity of Hell Torments” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust, www.banneroftruth.org.

As the glory of heaven cannot be fully understood until enjoyed, so the torments of hell cannot be comprehended until felt.—*William Bates*

CHRIST HAS THE KEYS OF HELL AND OF DEATH

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”—Revelation 1:18

DEATH is a land of darkness, as darkness itself, without any order. Yet a sovereign eye surveyeth it, and a master hand holdeth its key. Hell is also a horrible region...But hell trembles at the presence of the Lord...Let us rejoice that nothing in heaven, earth, or in places under the earth is left to itself to engender anarchy. Everywhere, serene above the floods, the Lord sitteth King forever and ever. No province of the universe is free from the divine rule. Things do not come by chance. Nowhere doth chance and chaos reign. Nowhere is evil really and permanently enthroned. Rest assured that the Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens and His kingdom ruleth over all. For if the lowest hell and death own His government, much more all things that are on this lower world.

It is delightful for us to observe as we read this chapter that [the] government of hell and of death is vested in the person of the Man Christ Jesus. He Who holdeth the keys of these dreadful regions is described by John as “One like unto the Son of man” (Rev 1:13), and we know that He was our Lord Jesus Christ Himself...These keys are committed to the Son of man: and Jesus Christ—bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, made in all points like unto His brethren—ruleth over all...The metaphor of keys is intended, no doubt, to set forth the double thought of our Lord’s possessing both the rightful and the actual dominion over death and hell...Christ hath the keys of hell

and death—that is to say, He is rightfully the Lord over those dark regions and rules them by indefeasible⁶⁸ title of sovereignty...He actually rules and manages in all the issues of the grave and overrules all the councils of hell, restraining the mischievous devices of Satan or turning them to subserve⁶⁹ His own designs of good. Our Lord Jesus Christ still is supreme! His kingdom, willingly or unwillingly, extends over *all* existences in whatever regions they may be.

WHAT IS INTENDED BY THE POWER OF THESE KEYS HERE MENTIONED? First of all, a key is used for *opening*. Hence, our Lord can open the gates of death and hell. It is His to open the gate of the separated spirits, to admit His saints one by one to their eternal felicity.⁷⁰ When the time shall come for us to depart out of this world unto the Father, no hand but that of the Well-beloved shall put that gold-en key into the lock and open the pearly gate that admits the right-eous to the spirit-land...He is the resurrection and the life. Because He lives, we shall live also. At His bidding, every bolt of death's prison house shall be drawn, and the huge iron gates of the sepulcher shall be rolled back...Of all that the Father gave to Christ, He will lose nothing, but will surely raise it up at the Last Day (Joh 6:39). Christ has purchased the bodies as well as the souls of His people. He hath redeemed them by [His] blood, and their mortal frames are the temples of the Holy Ghost! Rest assured, *He will not lose a part of His purchase*. It is not the will of our Father in heaven that the Redeemer should be defrauded of *any* part of His purchased possession. "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise" (Isa 26:19).

But a key is also used to *shut* the door. Even so, Jesus will both shut in and shut out. His golden key will shut in His people in heav-en...But, alas! There is the dark side to this shutting of the gate. It is Christ, Who with His key shall shut the gates of heaven against unbelievers...A key is used to shut and to open, and so it is used to shut in, in reference to hell, those spirits who are immured⁷¹ there. "Between us and you," said Abraham to Dives,⁷² "there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence" (Luk 16:26). It is Christ's key that hath shut in the lost spirits, so that they cannot roam by way of respite, nor escape by way of pardon...We understand by Christ having the keys of hell that He rules over all that are in hell. Hence, He rules over the damned spirits. In this life, they would not have this Man to rule over them; but in the life to come, they must submit whether they will or not. In that seething caldron, every wave of fire is guided by the will of the Man Christ, and *the mark of His sovereignty is on every iron chain*. This, the ungodly will be compelled to feel with terror; for though the ferocity of their natures will remain, the boastfulness of their pride shall be taken from them. Though they would still revolt, they shall find themselves hopelessly fettered and powerless to accomplish their designs...One of the great terrors of the lost in hell will be this: He Who came to save was rejected by them; now [He] only reveals Himself to them as [One] mighty to destroy... What must be the consternation of those that were loudest against Christ on earth, the men who denied His deity, the infidels who vented curses upon His blessed name—your Voltaires⁷³ and Tom Paines,⁷⁴ who were never satisfied except when they uttered bitter words against the Man of Nazareth? What will be their amazement!...What consternation and confusion shall overwhelm that man who said he lived in the twilight of Christianity, to find himself where the blaze of Christ's glory shall forever be as a furnace to his guilty soul! O that none of us may know what it is to be ruled in justice by Christ *because we would not be ruled by mercy*...

As in hell, Christ has power over all the damned spirits, so our text implies that He has power over all the devils...An abject slave of Christ art thou, O Satan—a very scullion⁷⁵ in the kitchen of providence. When thou thinkest most to effect thine own purposes and to over-throw the Kingdom of Christ on earth, even then what art thou but a mere hack, accomplishing still the purposes of thy Master, Whom in vain thou dost blaspheme! Lo, at Christ's girdle are the keys of hell. Let the whole legion of accursed spirits tremble...

Joyous is the thought that Jesus rules over all redeemed spirits in heaven, for we hope to be there soon! This shall be among our dearest joys: without temptation, without infirmity, without weariness, we shall serve our Lord day and night in His temple. My brethren, of all the joys of heaven, next to that of being with Christ, one delights to think of serving Christ. Ah! How rapturous will be our song! How zealously we will praise Him! How earnest

⁶⁸ **indefeasible** – not able to be lost or overturned.

⁶⁹ **subserve** – to serve to promote; be useful to.

⁷⁰ **felicity** – happiness.

⁷¹ **immured** – imprisoned.

⁷² **Dives** (dī´vēz; from the *Latin Vulgate*) – the rich man at whose gate Lazarus lay.

⁷³ **Voltaire**, born **Francois Marie Arouet** (1694-1778) – French Enlightenment anti-Christian playwright and author.

⁷⁴ **Thomas Paine** (1737-1809) – pamphleteer, revolutionary, deist, and critic of the Bible.

⁷⁵ **scullion** – a kitchen servant employed to do unskilled, humiliating work.

shall be our service! If He should give us commissions to distant worlds, as perhaps He will; if He shall prepare us to become preachers of His truth to creatures in unknown orbs;⁷⁶ if He shall call us through revolving ages to publish to newly created myriads⁷⁷ the wondrous grace of God in Christ, with what ardent pleasure will we accept the service! How constantly, how heartily will we tell out the story of our salvation by the precious blood of Jesus! O that we could serve Him *here* as we wish! But we shall serve Him there without fault or flaw. Oh, happy heaven, because Jesus hath the key of it and reigns supreme, when shall we stand upon thy sea of glass before His throne?

One more remark is wanted to complete the explanation of the power of the keys. Our Lord is said to have the keys of death, from which we gather that all the issues of death are at His disposal alone. No man can die unless Jesus opens the mystic door of death. Even the ungodly man owes his spared life to Christ. It is the intercession and the interposition of Jesus that keeps breath even in the swearer's nos-trils. Long since hadst thou been consumed in the fire of God's wrath, O sinner, had not Jesus used His authority to keep thee out of the jaws of death. As for His saints, their consolation is that their death is entirely in His hands. In the midst of fever and pestilence, we shall never die until He wills it. In the times of the greatest healthiness, when all the air is balm, we shall not live a second longer than Jesus has purposed. The place, the circumstance, the exact second of our departure have all been appointed by Him and settled long ago in love and wisdom. A thousand angels could not hurl us to the grave, nor could a host of cherubim confine us there one moment after Jesus said, "Arise!" This is our comfort...Let us never fear death then, but rather rejoice at the approach of it, since it comes at our dear Bridegroom's bidding...Though the prospect of our Lord's coming is sweet, immeasurably sweet, yet the prospect of going to Him meanwhile—if *He so wills it*—is not without its sweetness too. Christ hath the key of death, and therefore death to us is no longer a gate of terror...

WHAT IS THE KEY OF THIS POWER? Whence did Christ obtain this right to have the keys of hell and death? Doth He not derive it first of all from His Godhead? In the eighteenth verse, He saith, "I am he that liveth," language that only God can use...God saith, "There is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else" (Isa 45:6). And Jesus being God claimeth the same self-existence. "I am he that liveth." Now, since Christ is God, He certainly hath power over heav-en, earth, and hell...He is the creator of all things. He is the preserver of all things. All power belongeth unto Him. As for all things that are apart from Him, they would vanish as a puff of air is gone if He willed it so. He alone existeth. He alone *is*. Therefore let Him wear the crown, let Him have undivided rule.

That doctrine of the deity of Christ—how I tremble for those who will not receive it! Brethren, if there be anything in the Word of God that is clear and plain, it is surely this. If there be any doctrine that is necessary for our salvation, it is this. How could we trust to a mere man? If there be anything that can give us comfort when we come to rest upon Christ, it is just this: we are not looking to an angel nor depending upon a creature, but are resting upon Him Who is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the Almighty God!...Having such a rock of our salvation as the ever-living and ever-blessed God, let the thought kindle in our souls the purest joy!

But the key to this power lies also in our Savior's conquests. He hath the keys of death and hell because He hath actually conquered both these powers. You know how He met hell in the dreadful onset in the garden, how all the powers of darkness there combined against Him. Such was the agony of that struggle that He sweat great drops of blood falling to the ground. Yet He sustained the brunt of that onset without wavering and kept the field unbeaten. He continued to wrestle with those evil powers upon the cross. In that thick midday midnight into which no curious eyes could pry, in the midst of that darkness, *He continued to fight*—His heel bruised, but breaking the drag-on's head meanwhile! Grim was the contest, but glorious was the victory, worthy to be sung by angels in eternal chorus! Take down your sweetest harps, ye seraphs! Lift up your loudest notes, ye cherubim, unto Him that fought the dragon and overcame him...unto [Christ] be glory forever and ever! Well doth Jesus deserve to rule the provinces that He hath subdued in fight. He has conquered the king of hell and destroyed the works of the devil. Good right hath He to be King over the domain of the vanquished!

As to death, ye know how our Lord vanquished him! By death, He conquered death. When the hands were nailed, they became potent to fight with the grave! When the feet were fastened to the wood, then began they to trample on the sepulcher! When the death pangs began to thrill through every nerve of the Redeemer's body, then His arrows shot through the loins of death! And when His anguished soul was ready to take its speedy flight and leave His blessed corpse, then did the tyrant sustain a mortal wound! Our Lord's entrance into the tomb was the

⁷⁶ **orbs** – heavenly bodies; worlds.

⁷⁷ **myriads** – countless numbers of men.

taking possession of His enemies' stronghold. His sleep within the sepulcher's stony walls was the transformation of the prison into a couch of rest.

But especially in the resurrection, when, because He could not be held by the bonds of death, neither could His soul be kept in Hades, He rose again in glory, then did He become the "death of death and hell's destruction"⁷⁸...As if to prove that He had the keys of the grave, Jesus passed in and passed out again; and He hath made free passage now for His people...By His achievements, by His doings, He hath won for Himself the power of the keys.

We have one more truth to remember: Jesus Christ is installed in this high place of power and dignity by the Father Himself as a reward for what He has done. He was Himself to "divide the spoil with the strong," but the Father had promised to give Him a "portion with the great" (Isa 53:12). See the reward for the shame that He endured among the sons of men! He stooped lower than the lowest; He has risen higher than the highest. He wore the crown of thorns, but now He wears the triple crown of heaven, earth, and hell. He was the servant of servants, but now He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Earth would not find Him shelter—a stable must be the place of His birth and a borrowed tomb the sepulcher of His dead body—but now, all space is His, time and eternity tremble at His bidding, and there is no creature, however minute or vast, that is not subject to Him! How greatly hath the Father glorified Him Whom men rejected and de-spised! Let us adore Him! Let our hearts, while we think over these plain but precious truths, come and spread their riches at His feet and crown Him Lord of all!...

Should not this contemplation make us say, "Let us worship Him Who hath the keys of hell and death! Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving and show ourselves glad in Him with songs"? Preaching is not the great end of the Sabbath-day; listening to sermons is not the great aim of Sundays. It is a means; what is the end? Why, the end, as far as we can attain it on earth, is for us to glorify God in service, and especially in the singing of His praises. Worship rendered to God in prayer and praise is the true fruit of the Sabbath, and I am afraid we are behind in this. I wish that when believers come together, they would oftener render unto Christ the coronals⁷⁹ of their hymns to crown Him Lord of all. His enemies miss no opportunity to spite Him; those that hate His Gospel are zealous to bring shame upon it. Oh, miss no opportunities to extol Him with your praises and to honor Him with the holiness of your lives and the zeal of your service. Is He King over heaven, death, and hell? Then shall He be King over the triple territory of my spirit, soul, and body; and I will make all my powers and passions yield Him praise.

To conclude: If to the righteous the lesson from all this is, "Fear not," methinks the lesson to the ungodly is, "Fear and tremble." Christ hath the keys of death. You may die this moment; you may die ere you reach your homes. You have not the key of death. You cannot therefore prolong your life. But Christ hath it, and He can end the times of His longsuffering just when He so wills it. And what would it be to some of you if the gate of death was opened for you, and you were driven through it like dumb, driven cattle this very day? O man, what would become of thee? O woman, what would become of thee, if now those eyes should glaze and that pulse should stop? I beseech thee, consider thy ways, and turn thee unto God, lest thou die and perish [suddenly]. Remember, soul, if thou wouldst fight it out with Christ and be His enemy, yet thou canst not: for He is Lord and will be Lord. Even shouldst thou fly to hell to escape Him, *He ruleth there*...Wherever you may go, there shall the remembrances of His rejected love pierce you like barbed arrows! Even in hell shall the glory of His power, which you could not thrust down though you tried to do it, strike you with a deeper despair. I *implore* you to listen to His Gospel. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mar 16:16). This is the message He gave us when He was taken up...O then, yield to His Gospel! *Believe*, that is, trust implicitly in Him Who died on the cross of Calvary to make atonement and now liveth to make intercession. Trust in Him...Be baptized in His name, confessing your sins and acknowledging yourself to be His disciple. This is the Gospel: reject it at your peril. Submit to it, I beseech you, for Christ's sake.

From a sermon delivered on Lord's Day morning, October 3, 1869,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): English Baptist; history's most widely read preacher (apart from those in Scripture); born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.

⁷⁸ From the hymn "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" by William Williams (1717-1791).

⁷⁹ **coronals** – small crowns signifying rank or dignity.

[Christian,] how you should praise the Son for having died to save you from the Lake of Fire! How you should praise the blessed Spirit for having quickened you into newness of life! And how your appreciation ought to be expressed now in a life that is glorifying to the Triune God!—*A. W. Pink*

