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AIONION – EVERLASTING.

New Jersey, Jan. 6th, 1885.

DEAR BROTHER RUSSELL: – May I take the liberty to express my surprise on reading some of your remarks in answering questions relating to "Sheep and Goats?"

Answering the question does the word *everlasting* in verse 46 (Matt. 25.) indicate that the punishment will last *forever*? You say "It certainly does," and add, "When some one told you that the Greek word *aionion* here rendered *everlasting*, had no such meaning, but ALWAYS meant a limited period of time, they misinformed you, and merely applied a definition common to a sect called "Adventists," but nevertheless an error." And further on you say: – "If Adventists and Universalists claim that *aionion* here always means a *limited* period, they should, to be consistent, hope only for a life of *limited* duration for the righteous, since the same Greek word is used in reference to both.

The surprise is that you should say such things of the "Adventists." I have known them, and was among them, one of them for more than thirty years. They have always admitted that the same Greek word used with reference to both the righteous and the wicked in this place, must have the same force in each case, *as to duration*; that the "*everlasting*" punishment of the one class will be just as long as the "eternal" life of the other. And they have always claimed it not a question of duration, but of the *nature* of the *punishment*, and it has been very common among them to explain Matt. 25:46, by quoting Paul's language in 2 Thess. 1:9, making the *everlasting punishment* in the one text the exact equivalent of the *everlasting destruction* in the other, absolutely *without limit*. And they have constantly emphasized the utter hopelessness of the *punishment* by explaining that the Greek word is *kolasin*, which means, literally, to *cut off*, or *lop off*, as when

a limb, or the branches of trees are cut or lopped off; this being *everlasting*, could not possibly admit of the idea of limitation.

I am perfectly sure, dear brother, that you would not knowingly misrepresent any one's views.

Yours in Jesus, Our glorious Lord and Living Head,

R. WAKEFIELD.

P.S. I would add, that the Adventists, in speaking of the "*everlasting fire*," v. 41, claimed that, even if forced to allow that the *fire* was *everlasting*, the same word, *aionion*, being used, still, the office of fire being not to preserve, but to destroy, it would prove beyond a possible question, that the wicked being cast into the fire, they must inevitably perish. And further, as it was well understood that *aionion* has, sometimes, a limited signification, it was suggested that the fire having done its work of destruction might then (supposing it to be literal) be permitted to go out, in perfect harmony with the sense of the passage.

We are thankful to our Brother for the above correction. We probably had in mind when writing the paragraph referred to, a class of people who might be termed – "Universalist-Adventists." The Brother is right, we would not willingly misrepresent any. The definition given above is entirely satisfactory to us.

It occurs to us that our views on the meaning of the word *aionios* were not fully apprehended by some. We were controverting the view – that this word *always* means a *limited* period. We have never claimed that it *always* means *never ending* but rather a space or epoch of time upon which no limit has been placed. Thus in the Old Testament the corresponding word *olam* is used with reference to laws and regulations then in force "This shall be a statute unto you

[olam] *forever*" i.e. it has no limitation it would last until for some cause God its mandator should replace it with another.

Apply this same definition (continuous – unlimited) to the word *aionios* in Matt. 25:46, and it would read the righteous into continuous life, but the wicked into continuous [i.e. uninterrupted] punishment, [elsewhere shown to be the second death.] Whatever is claimed for the word *aionios* toward the one class must be admitted toward the other.

To our understanding, the "fire" of Matt. and of Rev. is figurative of *destruction*, to the evil class spoken of as cast into it. Hence substituting the definition for the figure it would read *everlasting destruction* – the second death.

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