

EVERLASTING, HELL, AND DAMNATION.

J. G. Townsend, well known as a former talented Methodist minister, recently severed his connection with the M.E. Church, and has since been preaching to an Independent Congregation at Jamestown, N.Y. In one of his sermons he gave the following picture of hell: –

"Suppose a tube, so long that it would take a drop of water a million years to get to the bottom of it. Pass all the water in Chautauqua lake, drop by drop through that tube, and that would be a computable period. By and by the water would all pass through the tube. Pour all the waters of the Atlantic ocean and the Pacific ocean, drop by drop through that tube, and eternity would only have begun. Turn the great suns yonder into oceans of water and put them all through the tube, a drop in a million years, and yet the eternal punishment would only have begun. Do you think the Heavenly Father would put that punishment on any of his children for the sins of this transient life? It is atrocious to think of it. I believe that this doctrine of eternal hell is a lie against man – is a lie against God, and sooner than preach it, I would let my tongue rot in my mouth. I deny that the Bible teaches it. Suppose you were to take out of the Bible the word *damnation*, the word *hell*, the word *everlasting* as applied to punishment; would you not think that it would mitigate the idea of punishment, soften it, ameliorate it? Certainly it would. Now I want to state upon the authority of eminent scholars, and upon my own authority, after a careful examination of the words of the original, that not one of these words, neither *damnation*, nor *hell*, nor *everlasting*, has any right whatever within the lids of the Bible. All of them are imported words, mistranslations. They have no critical, or just, or moral right to remain in the Bible."

We can agree in part with the above statement of facts, and fully with the speaker's spirit. Those who claim that God will everlastingly torture his children for the sin of Adam with their own sins of a few

short years, full of trouble and weakness inherited and encountered from the moment of birth, are often possessed of more tender affection than their theology would seem to indicate. In a word, they though fallen and imperfect, are nobler, more just and more loving, than their narrow theological views permit them to think the God of love and justice to be.

They excuse this and attempt to give it the appearance of justice, by saying that a sin committed against an infinite being is an infinite sin, and therefore in justice must receive an infinite (unlimited) punishment. While it is true that in judging of the enormity of sin the standpoint of God and of perfect manhood should be recognized, and not our standpoint as fallen and depraved beings, yet to make the penalty depend upon the infinity of God is so manifestly unjust, that naught but dire necessity to give an appearance of justice to their theological dogma can have invented such a theory. On the contrary, the degree of heinousness of a sin depends upon the state and capacity of the transgressor. If an infinite being were to commit sin, it might be termed an "infinite sin," but for a finite being to sin could only be a finite sin.

The full penalty of sin is *death* – destruction – extinction; and if each individual of the world were to be individually *tried* under this penalty, each would of necessity have to be perfect, possessing full ability and under favorable circumstances to resist sin. But such opportunity none but Adam has yet enjoyed, all being tried representatively in him, and thus condemned to the full penalty righteously, though they had no individual trial. For it cannot be gainsaid that the Creator had a perfect right, if he had so chosen, to have withheld his power and not created us at all, or having created us, he could righteously have blotted us out of existence even if obedient, had he not graciously purposed and promised life everlasting upon condition of obedience.

And now while he has exhibited to us all, and to angels as well, his thorough and relentless determination that sin shall not be permitted, and that its wages is death, he exhibits also his love by providing in Jesus a *ransom* price for all; arranging that through this Saviour all shall ultimately be released from Adamic sin (and all sins growing out of the fallen disposition inherited, and the evil surroundings incident to and resulting from Adam's fall and from the penalty of sin,) in order that in an appointed season the whole world should be judged or tried again by the Christ of God (1 Cor. 6:2; Matt. 19:28); not again representatively but individually.

This trial as yet has reached and developed only two small elect classes – the overcomers of this age and those preceding – tried beforehand in the midst of evil surroundings for special purposes and positions. But ultimately each individual of the race will have as full and fair an opportunity as had their representative Adam in the first trial, and in addition to this will have the benefit of present experience in sin and its penalty. Thus each shall decide his own case by his own conduct. Those obedient shall live forever; those who will not conform to God's will are condemned as unworthy of life and shall be cut off from it – shall die for their own disobedience, as before they were under death for Adam's disobedience. Hence it is called the second death. It will be everlasting. No ransom will be given for it and there will be no resurrection from it. Justice, Mercy and Love unite with one will, in this *everlasting* penalty for wilful sin. It is here, that we agree only in part with the above statement of brother Townsend.

The Greek language seems to lack a word corresponding exactly to our word *everlasting*. The Greek word *aionios* translated "everlasting" signifies literally *unlimited*, i.e., a period upon which no limit is expressed. Hence when it is used with reference to the disposition of the sheep and goats of Matt. 25:46 it is evidently not improper to translate it *everlasting* as applying to the penalty as well as the reward; everlasting or *unlimited death* to one class, and everlasting or *unlimited life* to the other. The words everlasting and

eternal in this verse are from the same Greek word *aionion*. The reward to obedience is life, and of sin the punishment is not torture, nor life in any condition, but *death*, (Rom. 6:23); and this verse (46) declares that the results of the trial described and illustrated in this parable, are not transient, but lasting – unlimited.

The word *damnation* as generally understood to mean *endless woe*, is, we agree with brother T., totally without a Scripture basis. Its strongest significance is *condemnation* or *rejection*. Jesus applies the same word *krima* in John 9:39, where it is translated "judgment." "For judgment am I come into the world;" yet that he did not there use the word in its usual signification is clear from his other statement that he came not to condemn [*krino* sentence] the world, but that the world through him might be saved. – John 3:17.

Again, we agree with brother T. that the word *hell* (with the meaning at present attached to the word) is an improper translation of either *sheol*, *hades* or *gehenna* and it is unauthorized by the meaning or use of these words. The first two simply refer to the condition or state of death, as the penalty of Adam's sin, which would have been everlasting had God not mercifully provided "a *ransom* for all," in Christ our Lord, by reason of which it may be considered merely a long sleep.

Gehenna (the name of a valley outside of Jerusalem where fires were kept burning to destroy the offal of the city, and never used as a place of torture,) is used in Scripture to represent in a symbolic manner the *utter and hopeless destruction* (not torment) of the second death, from which there is no hope of recovery.

=====