

# THERE IS A HELL

THE doctrine of hell is an unwelcome subject to many people. A place of "everlasting punishment" is not a popular theme among those who love sin. And particularly in these last days when the fundamental teachings of the Bible are considered obsolete and old-fashioned in the opinion of modern scholars, and the great truths that once constituted the foundation of Christianity are being ruthlessly swept aside, this doctrine of hell is being scoffed at and ridiculed as a worn-out fable, a theological dogma, a superstition of the past to be relegated to the rubbish heap. This assault on those teachings of God's Word which to men are distasteful is not now carried on, as one might suspect by professed infidels and atheists, but mostly by professing Christians who claim to believe the Bible. We do not find many of these objectors denying the teaching of Heaven and its eternal glories; but when it comes to the other side of the question — hell and eternal perdition — then they cry, "Away with such teaching!" Many are silent on the subject. Even preachers, who are supposed to be evangelical and whose mission it is to teach "all the counsel of God," are too often found ignoring this side of God's counsel. They say, "The day of hell-fire sermons is past. We have no further need for such teachings. Let us preach the love of God."

## Dispensation of Grace

This age is, of course, the dispensation of grace; and the great theme of the church for nineteen centuries has been God's love for a lost world, His gracious provision for the redemption of sinners through the gift of His Son and the great Atonement upon Calvary's Cross. And such it should be. The world has known no greater theme. But while the God of the Bible is a God of love, even beyond all comprehension of man, yet He is not, as these modern religionists would have us believe, just an indulgent father, winking at transgressions of His law, tolerating all manner of sin in men, and being too merciful to punish the wicked. This is a lawless age when there is little regard for the laws of God or man. But God has never changed. He is still the God of Sinai, and His judgments which thundered forth in days of old may still be heard echoing down through the New Testament in no uncertain tones. They are sounded out in the Sermon on the Mount. They flash like fire through most of the Lord's discourses. They are written in bold letters on nearly every page of the Epistles. Alongside His proffers of mercy are still found His solemn warnings of the impending doom awaiting those "that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Modern religionists may banish the terrors of hell from their minds, modern theologians may erase this doctrine from their revised creeds. But they can never eradicate it from God's Word. It is still written, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psalm 9: 17).

## Philosophies of Men

So men, not because of their advanced knowledge and superior learning, but rather because of their antagonism toward unwelcome truth, have refused to accept the plain account given in the Bible of the hereafter, and have sought in other channels to solve the problem of that mysterious realm. Philosophers and sages down through the centuries have tried to reason their way through this labyrinth of mystery and to tell us what lies on the other side of the grave. Our libraries today are filled with their accumulated wisdom. But how far can the vain philosophies of mortal man carry him into a realm that mortal eye has never seen? He has sought to explore the mysteries of this present world. He has delved into the earth beneath, he has soared into the sky above, and has analyzed in some degree the material elements round about him; but, after all, he has solved only the smallest fraction of the problems that confront him in this visible world, to say nothing of the invisible. With all his knowledge, he is as much in the dark today concerning the hereafter as he was in the beginning. His learned speculations on the future state of man have accomplished nothing except to gender a confusion of creeds and false doctrines to bewilder and lead astray those who honestly want to know the truth.

Some amid all this confusion have become agnostics and have given up in despair, saying, "We can know nothing about the hereafter. No one ever came back from the grave to tell us whether there was a Heaven or a hell." But right at this point is where the Bible comes to our rescue. We have here the well-substantiated record of One who did come back from the grave. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ stands today as an authentic fact of history that has never been disproved. And this fact of the resurrection, this miracle of the ages, were there no other evidences before us, is sufficient of itself to establish forever every claim Jesus made to being the divine Son of God, and to confirm beyond the shadow of a doubt every word He uttered. He descended into, the grave, but the third day rose again. Later on He appeared in glory to the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos with these triumphant words: "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" (Rev. 1:18). On the question of eternity, then, as well as all other questions on which He spoke, we can well afford to listen to Him, not to the carnal reasonings of men, for "never man spake like this man."

## **Teaching of the Lord**

We have a number of discourses from the mouth of the Lord upon the future state of man. One discourse in particular gives us a very plain account about which there need be no misunderstanding, and that is the narrative of the rich man and Lazarus recorded in Luke 16:19-31. Here Jesus has parted that veil of mystery, which man for centuries has vainly tried to penetrate, and has allowed us to look upon a scene in the other world. Some have sought to detract from what to them is a too painful literalness in this account by calling it a parable. But there is no evidence that this is a parable. And it would not detract in the least degree from the plain truth of the narrative if it were a parable. Parables are given not to conceal but rather to reveal the truth. We, nevertheless, have every reason to believe that here we have a narrative of fact.

These two men are found living in their respective stations in this present life, one very rich and the other very poor, until in course of time that inevitable event overtakes them which comes to every man, to the just and to the unjust: "It is appointed unto men once to die." But death by no means ends it. "The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2: 7). That immortal soul survives all the vicissitudes of life, the shock of death, the dissolution of the body, and never ceases to exist throughout all the countless ages of eternity. In that final hour and article of death, "then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccl. 12: 7).

## **The Realm of the Dead**

So the curtain lifts and we behold these two men in the realm of the dead, it is true, but both keenly alive to their surroundings, each in full possession of his faculties, the powers of his soul unimpaired.

The region in which we find them is known in the original as "Hades." The Old Testament word for the same place is "Sheol." Both words are a number of times translated "hell," but the original meaning is simply the realm of the dead, that region beyond the grave into which all, the just and the unjust, are conducted at death. Another word in the New Testament translated "hell" is "Gehenna," the Greek form for the valley of Hinnom, a place outside the walls of Jerusalem where in the days of Israel's apostasy children were burned to Molech. This awful practice was abolished by Josiah, the valley defiled and cursed, and it subsequently became a place where the debris from the city was burned. And on account of its horrible association it became a type of the place of punishment of the wicked. The place to which is applied the name "Gehenna" seems to be identical with the "lake of fire" in Revelation, the final abode of the ungodly into which the wicked reserved in "Hades" shall be cast at the resurrection of the unjust (Rev. 20: 1115). And the fact that these names — "Hades," "Gehenna," "Sheol"—have earthly associations does not detract in the least from the literalness of the place in the other world to which they are applied. On the contrary, it emphasizes it.

While, therefore, Lazarus and the rich man awoke in the same general region, the realm of the dead called "Hades," yet what a change has been wrought by this transition from time to eternity! The whole order of things seems reversed from their life on earth. Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom; the rich man is in hell. Lazarus is comforted; the rich man is tormented. Four times throughout this narrative that word occurs. "I am tormented in this flame," he cries; and he is even denied the poor, miserable comfort of a drop of water to cool his tongue. Jesus elsewhere describes this region of the lost as a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth," a place of "everlasting fire," "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." In the revelation which He gave to the Apostle on the Isle, John saw the "smoke of their torment" going up forever. So here we have it: there is a hell. And that name, with all that it conveys to the mind, is no more terrible than Jesus' own description of that place. Call it "Hades," call it what you will, spiritualize or allegorize these passages if you want to, wrest the Scriptures as you may—the fact remains, whether you call it "Hades" or "Gehenna": there is a place of "everlasting punishment." The Lord has said it.

## **False Doctrines**

These Scriptures not only establish the fact of hell, but they refute at once the many false doctrines that are current in the world concerning the future state of man. Foremost among these is Universalism which maintains that eventually all men will be saved, that if men are punished at all it is for corrective purposes that in the end they might be saved. But that one word, "everlasting," applied to the punishment of the wicked is enough in itself to refute this doctrine. The rich man never made request for temporary release even from that place of torment. He knew it was useless. There was a "great gulf fixed." He asked that Lazarus might be sent to his brethren. When a man has reached that place, he has passed beyond the stage of correction. His character, like that great gulf, is eternally fixed — "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which' is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Rev. 22: 11). There is no probation beyond the grave. This is the world where we are to make preparation for Heaven: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6: 2).

These Universalists, along with many others, insist that it is entirely inconsistent with God's character as a God of love to believe that He would cast men into hell and punish them eternally. But why should there be any difficulty here? Is it inconsistent with good government to punish the lawless? Is it not absolutely necessary in the very nature of things in human government to punish offenders if law and order are to be preserved? Therefore it is a legal axiom that no law is of force until there is a penalty attached for its violation. And if this is the case among men, how much more is it the case in God's government where "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled"? God has therefore given us His law; He has also written the penalty, and that penalty is made to fit the crime. The breaking of an infinite law demands infinite punishment. God is love, and in His love He provided a way of escape from the penalty of the law.

A chance after death is also taught in that piece of fiction put out by the Catholic church in their doctrine of "purgatory," a place supposed to be somewhere midway between Heaven and hell where Catholics only (all others they say go direct to hell) may be purged from their sins in the purgatorial flames of that place, and thus receive their final preparation for Heaven. But the same Scriptures which apply against the Universalist also refute this doctrine. There is no chance after death. The Lord disclosed but two places to our view: the one where Lazarus was comforted, the other where the rich man was tormented. There was no place between them: all that intervened was a "great gulf fixed." God has made but one provision by which our sins may be purged: "Without shedding of blood is no remission." A fountain of purgation was opened upon Calvary for sin and all uncleanness; and that cleansing will be accomplished in this present world, or we shall never be purged of our sins.

Another monstrous lie that has found wide acceptance and has enlisted a large following in these last days is the doctrine of Spiritualists, a belief that the spirits of the departed dead return to earth and commune with the living. The Spiritualist's source of truth is not the Word of God; he gets his information firsthand through these spirits from the other world. And by this means he has had some new "revelations." Among others, he claims to have learned that sin, after all, is not so exceedingly sinful; it is inherent in the flesh only, not in the soul. When, therefore, he dies, his sin is buried in the grave with his flesh and his soul goes free. It is obvious, then, that according to his religion there is no necessity for a place of punishment after death.

The delusion of the Spiritualists is not a new one. This is what in Bible times was called "sorcery," intercourse with "familiar spirits." And the Spiritualists are not the only ones engaged in this practice. There are many in the various religious circles who claim to be receiving "revelations," fulfilling well the prophecy of Paul: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (I Tim. 4:1). In Isaiah we read: "And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8: 19, 20). The rich man was denied the request that Lazarus be sent back to earth to warn his five brethren, lest they should come to that same place of torment: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." God has given the world His inspired Word to impart the truth to men, and He has no need to employ the spirits of the dead to supplement that truth. The dead never return. But there are lying spirits out of the pit that are communing with men and deceiving them. If a man would know the truth let him go to the Word of God. "Thy word is truth."

There are many other spurious doctrines abroad concerning the hereafter: the Christian Scientist says, "Hell is just an evil thought"; the Russellite says, "There is no hell"; the Adventist says, "The wicked are annihilated"; others say, "The soul sleeps in the grave until the resurrection." And so we might continue. But the most of these doctrines are so glaringly opposed to the plain Word of God that no refutation is necessary.

## **Testimonial Evidence**

In spite of the sophistries of the wise, in spite of the doctrines of men and devils, in spite of every effort on the part of man to solve the mystery of the hereafter, no substitute has ever been found for the plain explanation given in the Word of God which will satisfy the heart and conscience of the honest seeker after the truth. And in substantiation of what the Bible teaches about the hereafter we have numerous testimonies, both among the saved and the unsaved, of those who have stood on the brink of eternity and with their last words have vindicated to the letter the Word of God. If ever one is free from the sham and superficiality of this life and is in a position to see things as they are — not as men think they are — it ought to be in that solemn hour when he is about to pass from time into eternity, when, stripped of all that is false, he stands face to face with the realities of that other world. /Death tests every man's creed. We can well afford, then, to give heed to the testimony of such a one.

A noted French infidel, who spent his life in attempting to overthrow the Christian faith, found himself in his dying hour unsupported by his philosophy of unbelief, and exclaimed to his physician: "I am abandoned by God and man! I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six months' life. Then I shall go to hell; and you will go with me. O Christ! O Jesus Christ!" His nurse fled from the room and 'cried, "For all the wealth in Europe I would not see another infidel die."

Another man, who in his younger days knew the Lord, turned in later years to a life of infidelity and terrible sin. On his dying bed he left this testimony: "When will be the last breath, the last pulse that shall beat my spirit out of this decayed mansion to death and hell? Ah, the forlorn hopes of him that

has no God! God has become my enemy, and there is none able to redeem me. Oh, that I was to lie and broil upon that fire a hundred thousand years, to purchase the favor of God and be reconciled to Him! But it is a fruitless, vain wish. Millions of years will bring me no nearer to the end of my torture than one poor hour. Oh, the insufferable pangs of hell!"

On the other hand we have the glowing testimonies of those who believed the Bible and faithfully served their God. The great holiness leader, who fearlessly proclaimed the doctrine of sanctification, at the end of his long, arduous labors, said, "The best of all is, God is with us. He causeth His servants to lie down in peace." A great evangelist, as his life's /work drew to a close, exclaimed, "Is this death?"

Why, this is my coronation day! Earth is receding and Heaven is drawing near." And finally we have that crowning testimony of the Apostle Paul, penned to Timothy, as in a Roman prison he awaited the hour of his execution: "The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Tim. 4: 6-8).