

psalmist, "is better than life itself": of course, for life at its best is but an imperfectly transparent veil, on the other side of which "just men made perfect" have an immediate perception of the glory of God in Christ. Strictly speaking, indeed, "the eye is not satisfied with seeing," even in heaven. Aspiration will still be the glory of those who have been born into the better life. But the thirst of heaven will have no trace of pain in it. It will be simply the sense that for ages upon ages we shall still be able to make fresh discoveries of the greatness and goodness of our King, and of the beauty and wisdom of His works. We shall only thirst because the "wells of salvation" are too deep to exhaust, because that Feast of Tabernacles will never come to an end. But our thirst will not check the stream of our melody. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."<sup>1</sup>

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## NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON THE FUTURE PUNISHMENT OF SIN.

### IV. THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

IN this paper I shall endeavour to reproduce the teaching of the Fourth Gospel about the fate of those who reject the salvation offered by Christ.

In John iii. 16 we meet again, as a description of that from which God gave Christ to save men, St. Paul's technical and favourite term, *destroyed* or *lost*: "That every one who believeth in Him may not be *destroyed*, but may

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xxxv. 10.

have eternal life." So chapter x. 28: "They shall not be *destroyed* for ever, nor shall any one seize them out of My hand." The active form of the same verb, in the sense of *lose*, occurs in chapter vi. 39: "All that which (as we should say, 'All those whom') Thou hast given Me, that I should not lose any of it (of them) but should raise it (them) up at the last day." The same active form, in the sense of *destroy*, is found in chapter x. 10, referring to a wolf destroying sheep. Similarly, and in complete harmony with the classic use of the word as expounded in my first paper, in chapter xi. 50 Caiaphas suggests that it is better "that one man die on behalf of the people, and not that the whole nation be destroyed." He refers evidently to the utter ruin which seemed to hang over the nation.

The same technical term, as a description of the unsaved, is found also in the Synoptic Gospels. So Matthew x. 28: "Who is able to *destroy* both soul and body in Gehenna." And chapter vii. 13: "Broad is the way which leadeth to *destruction*."

This use of the same Greek word in documents so dissimilar as the Synoptic Gospels, the Fourth Gospel, and the Epistles of Paul suggests very strongly that its Aramaic equivalent was actually used by Christ, and in the same sense. And we have already seen that the chief idea conveyed by the Greek word is utter ruin, without thought of what becomes of the ruined object. We therefore infer with confidence that this was the chief thought of the earliest Christians about the fate of the unsaved, and that this conception was derived from, or sanctioned by, Christ.

As in the Epistles of Paul the destruction awaiting sinners is called *death*, so in John vi. 50 salvation is described as escape from death: "That one may eat of it, and not die." Also chapter xi. 26: "He that believeth in Me shall not die, for ever." His body will descend into the

grave and become a prey of worms ; but even bodily death will not be to him, as it is to others, utter ruin.

Already we have seen that in the Fourth Gospel and in the First Epistle of John the term *eternal life* is used in precisely the same sense as by St. Paul.

The phrase *anger of God* is used, in the sense familiar to us in the writings of St. Paul, in John iii. 36 : "He that believeth not shall not see life, but the anger of God abideth upon him."

In John v. 25 Christ is reported to say, that there comes, and has already come, "an hour when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and they who hear will live." The words, "and now is," noting a resurrection already beginning, prove that Christ refers to those who are spiritually "dead," through sins, to the Gospel which is "the voice of the Son of God," and to the spiritual life given at once to those who accept the Gospel. In verses 28, 29 we have another resurrection, remarkable both for its similarity to, and its differences from, the earlier one. It is in the future ; and therefore the words, "and now is," are absent. To mark the distinction from the spiritually dead just mentioned, Christ speaks in the second passage of "all that are in the graves." For, unlike the spiritual resurrection, the bodily resurrection will be universal. But, although in the great day "all in the graves will hear the voice" of Christ, not all "will live." For "resurrection of life" belongs only to those "who have done the good things." The rest "will go forth" from their graves to a "resurrection of judgment." This passage is instructive, as emphasizing the restriction, noted in my last paper, of the word *life* to the blessed dead. The wicked "shall not see life."

Another passage claims special attention. In John xii. 32 Christ makes the remarkable prediction, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all to Myself." At first

sight His words seem to mean that He will actually save all men. We inquire whether this appearance is confirmed by further research.

At once we notice that we have not here the emphatic phrase "all men," so conspicuous in Romans v. 12, 18, 1 Timothy ii. 1, 4; nor have we the universal phrase in John i. 9. This by no means implies, and perhaps does not even suggest, that the word *all* does not include the entire race. But it is worthy of note that the Evangelist, does not use a definite term ready to his hand and manifestly embracing all men. He is satisfied, in his reproduction of our Saviour's meaning, with a somewhat looser expression.

At the same time it is not easy to see how the word *all* can have a scope less than all mankind. Certain foreigners have come, seeking an interview with Jesus. Their arrival greatly moved Him. In them He sees the forerunners of multitudes from all nations, who will soon reach out their hands to Him for salvation, the beginning of a world-wide empire. But between Himself and that vast dominion looms in fearful outline the shadow of His cross. Only through suffering can He enter His glory. The cross must be the stepping-stone to the kingdom. For the nations will come to Him only when drawn by mysterious influences proceeding from Himself, influences which cannot be exerted till He has borne the sins of the world and has entered the Holiest Place to make intercession for men. That He may attract others, Himself must "be lifted up."

These last words are explained by the Evangelist as referring to the approaching crucifixion. And such apparently is the reference of the same words in chapter iii. 14: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must needs the Son of man be lifted up, in order that every one that believeth in Him may have eternal life." But the words added here, "from the earth," suggest a further

reference. Christ's shameful elevation on the cross is the first step towards the throne. And from that throne He will send forth the Holy Spirit, the mysterious Agent of a Divine influence, which will draw the nations to Christ. Only by Himself rising can He raise them.

We now ask, In what sense will Christ draw all men to Himself? An answer to this question will be found in the writings of St. Paul.

In Romans ii. 4, the Apostle says that God is leading to repentance a man of impenitent heart, who is treasuring up for himself anger in a day of anger. Evidently he means that upon this impenitent man "the kindness of God" is exerting influences tending towards repentance. These influences are the strong hand of God drawing him towards better things. It is equally certain that these influences are utterly in vain. The man shows no signs of repentance. He is still on the way to destruction. Indeed the penalty awaiting him is day by day increasing. He is heaping up a treasure of anger to be in that day revealed. These influences, real though in this case through man's resistance utterly ineffectual, St. Paul describes by the categorical indicative, "God is leading thee to repentance." The same tense is used in the same sense in Galatians ii. 14. St. Peter by his bad example was unintentionally doing his utmost to force the Gentiles to adopt Jewish modes of life. This St. Paul describes by assuming that he is compelling them to do so: "why compellest thou?" etc. Yet we have no proof or presumption that the Gentiles yielded to this compulsion. But whatever they did, a real influence was brought to bear upon them. Hence the Greek indicative.

Similarly, in Acts vii. 26, Stephen says, in reference to the two contending Israelites in Egypt, that Moses was reconciling them or "bringing them to peace." But we have no hint that his efforts were in the least degree

successful. Yet here again we have a Greek indicative. Our translators (A.V. and R.V.) have felt the unsuitability of the English indicative, and have rendered in harmony with our mode of thought, "would have set them at one again."

It is now evident that in their modes of conceiving and expressing ineffectual influences, the Greek and English languages differ. But the Greek mode of thought is as correct as our own, and more graphic. The hand of God was actually upon the impenitent man, exerting an influence which was none the less real because it was resisted, and was therefore ineffectual. And the work in which Moses was engaged with the two Israelites was peace-making, although it brought no peace.

This Greek mode of speech, and St. Paul's teaching in Romans ii. 4, explain and limit the words of Christ in John xii. 32. For the Apostle's assertion must be true of all men. Otherwise the man of impenitent heart, who is evidently a pattern of all such, could not be blamed for not knowing that the kindness of God was leading him to repentance. Moreover, whatever God does to man He does through the agency of our Lord Jesus Christ, "through whom are all things."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the assertion implied in Romans ii. 4 is but a fulfilment of the prediction and purpose of Christ recorded in John xii. 32. And this purpose is suitably expressed in the language actually used in this last passage. For whatever the Greek present indicative asserts touching time present, and the Greek imperfect about some time past of which the writer is thinking, the future indicative asserts about time to come. They describe an action going on in present, past, or future time. If, as St. Paul's words imply, Christ had resolved to exert on all men an influence drawing them to Himself, He might correctly say, even though He foresaw that in

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. viii. 6.

many cases, through man's resistance, this influence would be ineffectual, according to the usage of the Greek language, "I will draw all men to Myself." And there is in the context nothing whatever suggesting that He meant more than this. Consequently the passage before us in no way contradicts Philippians iii. 19, 2 Corinthians xi. 15, and other passages which imply an expectation that some men will be finally excluded from the glories of heaven.

Notice also that the teaching involved in John xii. 32 is a necessary complement to that of John vi. 44: "No one can come to Me, except the Father who hath sent Me draw him." For unless these influences, needful for salvation, were given to all men, the blame of each one's destruction would not lie at each one's own door.

One more passage bears directly on the matter before us. In John xv. 6 we read, from the lips of Christ, that the branch which does not continue in the vine is being cast into the fire, and is burning. Similarly in Matthew xiii. 30 and the parallel passages, in a picture of the final judgment, the wicked are compared to weeds bound together to be burnt. The same metaphor is traced in chapter iii. 10, 12 to the lips of the Baptist: "Every tree that beareth not good fruit is cut down and cast into fire; . . . the chaff He will burn up with unquenchable fire." It is also found in Hebrews vi. 8: "That which beareth thorns and thistles is reprobate and near to a curse, whose end is to be burnt." In all these passages the punishment of sin is compared to the destruction of vegetable matter by fire. And in the last passage this is said to be *the end* of the ungodly.

On the other hand, in 1 Peter i. 7, we have the metaphor of gold tested by fire. And in 1 Corinthians iii. 13 the judgment day is compared to a fire which will test every man's work.

Notice in these two classes of metaphors two distinct and opposite effects of fire. Faith is compared to gold which

is tested by fire, and thus proved to be genuine. But whenever fire is used as a symbol of the future punishment of sin, the wicked are compared to vegetable matter, to vine branches, or fruit trees, or chaff, or weeds, all which are destroyed utterly, and never purified or benefited, by fire. Throughout the New Testament there is no hint that the punishment of sin, under the image of fire, is remedial. It is always put in a form suggesting only destruction. For no destruction is more complete than that of vegetable matter by fire. And this metaphor is found, as we have seen, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and is attributed in each of the Four Gospels to Christ, and in each of the Synoptist Gospels to John the Baptist. It confirms strongly the teaching of Philippians iii. 19, 2 Corinthians xi. 15, Matthew xxvi. 24, Mark xiv. 21, that the punishment of the wicked is final.

Can we go a step farther, and say that the metaphor of destruction by fire teaches or suggests the annihilation of the wicked? Certainly the burning of vegetable matter comes as near to annihilation as does any natural phenomena. For the consumed branches and weeds become in a short time altogether invisible. May we therefore conclude that unconsciousness will be the ultimate fate of those who to the end refuse the offers of mercy?

It may be at once admitted that, if the annihilation of the wicked were as plainly taught elsewhere in the New Testament as is the finality of punishment in the passages quoted above, it would, like this last doctrine, be confirmed by the metaphor before us. Indeed this metaphor suggests search for such teaching. But the search is in vain. Outside the metaphor we are considering the New Testament contains, as this series of papers will prove, no hint whatever that the unsaved will ever cease to be. Now metaphor, unless supported by plain teaching, or at least by other metaphor agreeing with it only in the point in question, is

a most uncertain basis of doctrine. For all comparison fails somewhere. And, when doctrine is built simply on one metaphor, it is impossible to distinguish between the essential teaching, and the mere drapery, of the metaphor. If punishment be final, this is of itself sufficient to justify the use of the metaphor of destruction by fire; and therefore marks the limit of its doctrinal significance.

The Fourth Gospel has not materially increased our knowledge of the future punishment of sin; except that it has taught us that St. Paul's favourite mode of conceiving it, *viz.* as utter ruin, was equally familiar to the writer of the Fourth Gospel, whom I firmly believe to be the Apostle John, and was by him confidently attributed to Christ. We have found one passage which at first sight seemed to suggest that the salvation brought by Christ would actually reach and save all men. But this seeming contradiction to the plain teaching of St. Paul vanished before more careful research. In an opposite direction we found a metaphor suggesting the ultimate extinction of the lost. But more careful examination revealed only a strong confirmation of the finality of the future punishment of the impenitent.

In my next paper we shall discuss the more copious teaching of the Synoptist Gospels.

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