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"I am a voice"--John the Baptist

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A Frank Discussion

Is the torment of hell endless?
Is the Bible an Infallible
Book? Did Christ's atonement
appease God's wrath?

Article I

Why This Discussion

We propose to set forth the Scriptural view of endless torment in opposition to three articles against it in The Christian Thinker, by Editor Hurlbutt. In this article we shall answer his "Biblical argument," numbering the points as he did in his June issue. Other articles to follow.

The Attitude of Approach

He introduces the matter with a statement of his "painstaking study." This implies that the common view has not been espoused by thinkers and scholars. This is characteristic of Liberalism which draws its life from the arrogance of a self-reliant reason. Some of the greatest errors have been espoused by the most erudite. He who tries to carry his point by crying down the thinking powers of his opponents is not a fair controversialist.

Correspondence with him reveals the same feeling accentuated. A card dated July 26 says, "I cannot believe that you have gone to the bottom of some of the issues you so freely discuss." Again, in a letter of August 23 he writes, "You will have to show me that you are really open-minded on the subjects at issue. So far you seem to me to have ignored virtually every argument of mine. You say, 'I will renounce eternal torment if you can demonstrate by sound exegetical principles the absurdity of the position.' If my three painstaking articles have not at least made you think in a new groove, you will probably never see the light on this subject. I am wondering if you took the trouble to look up all the Scripture references."

We may leave unmentioned the years of study and thousands

of pages pro and con that we have read to emphasize the facts presented in these articles will determine who has thought through the issue and who is true to the Divine Revelation.

Arguments Refuted

1. Argument. "The ultimate result of sin is a death" of "complete LOSS instead of torment." That means, when a lost man dies, he does not exist as a conscious being. Death ends all for the impenitent.

Reply. Death never means cessation of being; nothing is plainer in Scripture than that. Those "dead in sins" (Eph. 2:1) were at the same time yet terribly alive and active in walking in "the course of this world," terribly alive in enmity against God (Rom. 8:7). The Prodigal was dead (Lk. 15:32), yet he was fully alive in riotous living. Thus spiritual death means to be away from God, a dread separation, an awful rupture of intimate relations. Eternal death will be only "more complete" along analogous lines. One is the type and forerunner of the other. Eternal death is spiritual death prolonged and intensified into eternal banishment from God. Logical reasoning demands such a view.

But in sec. 7, July issue, he makes eternal death mean "disintegration of the soul." The only question is: Do the Scriptures represent this "disintegration" as non-existence of the soul? Assuredly not. Such false reasoning denies these divine revelations: conscious existence after physical death (Lk. 16:19-31), the resurrection of the unrighteous (Jno. 5:29), future judgment (Acts 17:31), and the reservation of the wicked unto the day of judgment (II Pet. 2:19).

2. Argument. Such words as "destroy, perish, etc.," express "utter destruction" in the sense of ceasing to exist.

Reply. We shall examine each of these words. "Destroy" (Gk. "exclethreuo") in Acts 3:23 and "destruction" in II Thess. 1:9. The fact that these words are followed by "from among" (ek) and "from" (apo) shows that

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banishment is a prominent if not the chief idea. The latter passage reads, "Shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." There must be pain in punishment. And there must be consciousness to be pain. If there is no eternal person, there can be no eternal destruction. The obvious meaning of the English and the Greek is this, "The process of destruction will go on forever" (Pendleton, Christian Doctrines, p. 408). Joseph Angus, "As salvation is not merely continued life, neither is 'destruction' the cessation of life. Each is both present and future, and the future of each is only the present in its blessed or its awful completeness" (Three Letters on Future Punishment).

"Destroy" ("phtheiro") in II Peter 2:12 and Jude 10. "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy" (I Cor. 3:17). Both "defile" and "destroy" are the same word and mean defile or corrupt. The defiler of the temple does not put it out of existence. Nor can the word mean more in Peter and Jude than the defilement and corruption of sinners for which their sinful lives fitted them.

"Destroy them which destroy the earth" (Rev. 11:18). Why he quoted this passage is more than we can tell. The word is a compound form of the one just considered. It denotes the intensity of the corruption. The word occurs twice here. They destroyed the earth, still the earth existed. God will destroy sinners, still they will exist. Read it, "Put out of existence them which put the earth out of existence." You reply, "Absurd." But not a whit more absurd than the contention of Editor Hurlbutt.

He calls "apollumi" (lose, lost, perish, perdition) "the strongest word of such meaning in the highly perfected Greek tongue." All the passages quoted below have the same Greek root and reveal its meaning. "The lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt. 15:24) cannot mean that they were non-existent. The old world that "perished" (II Pet. 3:6) was not put out of existence. The bottles or wine skins that perished or were marred still existed (Mt. 9:17; Lk. 5:37). The word never teaches extermination of being but of well-

being. It means the ruin to which sin has sunk sinners. The wine skins ceased to serve the purpose for which they were formed and were turned over to ruin; sinners do not serve the Creator's purpose and are given over to suffer ruin, not extinction of being.

Did Jesus come to seek and to save that which was annihilated or non-existent? (Lk. 19:10). Is our gospel hid to them that have ceased to exist? (II Cor. 4:3). Substitute his meaning for "apollumi" (perish) in any of these or other passages and it makes nonsense. Try it.

Mr. 8:35, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." The last clause speaks of losing his life ("psyche") and yet saving it. How can "lose" in the first clause mean a cessation of being and not in the second? The contention of such "painstaking study" would be amusing if it did not pertain to eternally serious issues. The very passage he quoted refutes his own position.

Jesus says the shepherd finds the lost sheep, not one that ceased to exist (Lk. 15:4). The beast went forth into "perdition" (Rev. 17:8) and was still in the lake of fire after the 1,000 years (Rev. 20:10). Let Editor Hurlbutt tell us whether men and demons cease to exist at the moment they enter perdition or later, and if so, how long?

3. **Argument.** 'Believers' not perishing "implies that unbelievers will perish utterly" (Jno. 3:16).

..**Reply.** This argument depends largely on the meaning of "perish"; in sec. 2 we proved that it cannot mean non-existence of conscious being.

The contention is wholly without point because "eternal life" is not the opposite of non-existence but of blessedness. Note the absurdity of I Jno. 5:12 when we substitute existence for life, "He that hath the Son hath existence; he that hath not the Son hath not existence." That would deny the very existence of every one who has not the Son. "Life" is blessedness, the opposite of misery. "Eternal life" affirms eternal blessedness as the opposite of eternal misery.

4. **Argument.** "God only has immortality" (I Tim. 6:16).

Reply. He alone has underived, independent, essential immortality. It is bestowed on others. But why does not Editor Hurlbutt

tell us what "immortality" is, what the Greek word means? It is literally deathlessness, not endlessness. Who but God is out of the reach of death? All creatures are capacitated to die, but not so God. In sec. 5 he acknowledges that the Bible uses immortality of the body only. We so maintain. Only the redeemed have bodies immortal and incorruptible. But let the Editor prove that endlessness and immortality are the same; for that he contends. This text does not touch the issue; to use it thus betrays the desire to find support in Scripture for what has already been assumed independently of Scripture.

5. **Argument.** "There is no life apart from a body."

Reply. His solitary proof assumes that life, existence, and immortality are exact synonyms. What "painstaking study"! This argument shows our Editor's real belief; he is a materialist. Man naturally is no more divine than animals and has no spirit apart from the body. That is his belief. God's word says that man has a material body into which God breathed the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). No Scripture shows that He breathed the breath of life into any of the animal kingdom. Further, Jesus taught that the rich man had a conscious existence apart from the body (Lk. 16:19-31).

6. **Argument** "Failure of Christ to rise would have meant utter perishing of the believer" (I Cor. 15:18).

Reply. In part, this argument is nullified by reference to sec. 2, wherein we showed that "perish" does not mean a cessation of existence. He asserts, "Possibility of any life after death of the body is grounded on the survival of Christ." Rather, Paul's argument is, "Possibility of any resurrection after death of the body is grounded on the resurrection of Christ." His specious argument uses resurrection and life as convertible terms. He maintains that endless torment could not be the fate of those "fallen asleep in Christ" if Christ did not rise. Why could it not be? He asserts without proof. Paul argues that with the resurrection of Christ, stands or falls the whole scheme of redemption and the resurrection of the body.

7. **Argument.** "The wicked are likened to soulless beasts, and their end is that of such: Mt.

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7:6; Phil. 3:2; II Pet. 2:12; Jude 10."

Reply. Mt. 7:6 merely likens men who refuse the message to dogs and swine in their attitude, not in their souls. Any man is hard run to use this as an argument. "Beware of dogs" (Phil. 3:2) is a description of the Judiazers, and only by severe twisting can it be used in this discussion.

The point of comparison between beasts and wicked men is that evil men speak evil of divine things with no more regard than beasts. To strain the passage to make man soulless as beasts is far aside from the thought of Peter (II Pet. 2:12) and Jude (v. 10). His zeal in hunting apparent support for his theories would be an honor to a worthier cause.

8. **Argument.** The wicked will be completely burned up.

Reply. Let the "painstaking" Editor tell us which he believes. Does he believe (secs. 5 and 7) that men die like beasts? Or, does he believe it will take the fire of hell to burn them up? Mutually antagonistic and destructive arguments cannot be consistently urged against another view. One passage he cites (Mt. 13:40-42) puts the "burning up" at the Second Coming of Christ. What supports until His Coming the being that ended at death? Does our Editor believe in soul-sleeping or conditional immortality? He changes positions in his several arguments.

Sir Robt. Anderson confirms the soundness of my reply, "This (annihilation) implies what is called the 'natural immortality' of man. If by the law of his being he be destined to cease to exist, or if the death-penalty of sin imply extinction of being, the question here proposed cannot arise" (Human Destiny, p. 117).

Editor Hurlbutt claims that "unquenchable" (Gk. "asbestos") fire "indicates only the intensity, not the duration, of the fire." The truth is, it indicates both endlessness and intensity. He voids the word of duration because it vitiates his view, not because of the meaning of the word. He argues the meaning of "asbestos" because of the way we use it of asbestos materials. We accommodate it to materials when we have in our mind no thought of their end. This is a figurative use of the word, and we have no right to argue back

from a figurative English use against the literal and essential sense of the Greek term. The word is a compound, meaning "non-quenchable, non-extinguishable, not going out." He calls this "theological bias." If he cares a whit for his reputation as a Greek scholar, he knows I have given the true meaning of the term.

He says the fire may go out; Jesus calls it "everlasting fire" (Mt. 25:41). Reader, choose your authority. He says, "A fire that goes out when the material is consumed may be unquenchable while it is raging." Why limit it to "while it is raging"? This shows the weakness of his position. An unquenchable fire cannot go out or be put out from any cause; otherwise, words mean nothing.

Jesus says, "For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt" (Mk. 9:49). "Salted with fire" evidently teaches that the fire of hell will have preserving power as well as tormenting power.

Put the matter to a test. In Rev. 19:20 the beast and false prophet "were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone" at the beginning of the 1,000 years; Rev. 20:10 shows them still there after the 1,000 years.

9. **Argument.** "The punishment of the wicked is in process now, on earth."

Reply. Agreed. But is this all they will receive? Why a day of judgment? Why destruction at His Coming? Why a resurrection of the bodies of the wicked? Will our Editor affirm, "All the hell there is for the wicked is in this life?"

10. **Argument.** Sin and sinners discipline the elect; "sin and suffering are finally to be done away."

Reply. We agree that sin and sinners discipline and prove the saints. We try to learn our part. But this proves nothing against future and endless punishment. Sin and suffering will end for the righteous only. What a glorious prospect for them. But why does he not stick to the issue? The issue is the fate of the wicked. Theirs is one of endless suffering (Lk. 16; Rev. 14:9-11).

11. **Argument.** "In the consummation of the gospel age, all then existing will be subjected to Christ and to God, leaving no sinners and no hell."

Reply. All the Scriptures here quoted are urged by Restora-

tionists to prove that all sinners, demons, and the devil will be restored and saved. Let the Editor tell us plainly whether he believes in conditional immortality, annihilation, or restoration. He urges mutually antagonistic arguments.

12. **Argument.** "The present material world is to be destroyed, and from its elements will be formed a new world."

Reply. Homer nods. He says the material world will be destroyed and yet from its elements will be formed a new world. He does not use "destroyed" to mean non-existence. Nor does the Bible.

He uses Rev. 21:1-8. This pictures the new heaven and new earth. Yet instead of the "fearful and unbelieving," etc., (v.8) being subjected to Christ, they "shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Still yet 22:11 states the fixed character of men either in sin or righteousness—both classes still exist. Still further, Rev. 22:15 declares, "For without are dogs and sorcerers and whoremongers and murderers and idolaters and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." Men still in suffering outside the presence of God after the final restitution of all things.

Belle City Revival

The Editor assisted Pastor C. A. Smith at Belle City, Graves Co., Ky., Aug. 17-29. Results: 32 additions, 21 for baptism, 11 by letter; 18 professions.

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This issue begins the fifth year of this little paper. It wishes to thank all of its friends and hopes you will make its birthday a happy one by renewing your subscription and sending in those of others. If you have received the paper without subscribing for it, as a few of you have, send it a birthday subscription.

The first three Psalms form a key to the themes of the Book. The first Psalm centers around the word of God that classes men into two groups, saved and lost, unrighteous and righteous. Psalm two exalts Christ. Psalm three tells of the experiences of the godly in the midst of difficulties. Use this key in your study of the Psalms. Note that the first Psalm begins with "Blessed" and that the second Psalm so closes. Study the "blesseds" in the Psalms.

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