

# *Sin & Its Punishment*

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*"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth the law, for sin is the transgression of the law."*—(1 John 3:4).

If there is a definition of sin in the Bible, we have it in the last clause of this verse: "Sin is the transgression of the law." Of course, it means the transgression of God's law. God's law may be transgressed by thought, by feeling, by words, or by actions; for as we learn from other portions of the word of God, there are wicked thoughts, wicked feelings, wicked words, and wicked actions. This definition may not be exhaustive, but it is sufficient for our present purpose.

I wonder if any of us has ever realized what it is to commit sin. I believe that I would esteem above every other gift that could be bestowed upon me as a preacher, the power to adequately conceive what sin is, and to adequately set it before the people. A number of times in my ministrations, I have prepared sermons designed to set forth the enormity of sin; but I have every time felt that I made a failure. I found, I thought, two causes of the failure: first, a want of realization in my own soul of the enormity of it; and second, inability to gather up such words and such figures of speech, as would, with anything like adequacy, set it forth before my hearers. The pleasures of sin have blinded our eyes to its enormity. So I have come to the conclusion, after a great deal of reflection, and a great deal of mental effort, that about the only correct gauge we have with which to measure the enormity or heinousness of sin, is the punishment that God has decreed against it. God is infinite in all His attributes; infinite in mercy, in love, in compassion; and when we find the punishment that such a God as that was constrained, by the justice that also characterizes him, to enact against sin, I think we shall be better able to form an idea of its enormity than we can from any other view of the matter. This is the reason why, in announcing the subject of the present discourse, I named it, "Sin and its Punishment."

It may be a question in the minds of some whether there is any punishment of sin, either in this world or the world to come. But there is one thing certain, that this world has been freighted, from its earliest history, with a vast burden of woe and pain and death. The journey of human life is strewn with team; the whole earth on which we live has become dotted over with grave-yards. Death, preceded by incalculable pains of the body; the whole period of the life filled with interchanging smiles and tears; anguish of heart relieved by times of joy and happiness, have been our history. The word of God tells us that all this woe, pain, sin, sorrow and death, are the result of sin. It is a punishment that the infinite God, against whom we have sinned, has laid upon us in the present life. "By man, sin entered into the world," says the Apostle Paul, "and death by sin;" and all that train of evils which brings us down to the grave, is included. If a man deny the Bible doctrine on this subject of the source of all our woe, then call upon him to give an account of it—whence did it come? The fact that the Bible ascribes it to sin is no mean evidence that the Bible tells the truth; for it can not be accounted for in any other conceivable way. So then, all of the pain and woe and misery and death that the human race has experienced since the days of Adam to the present time, are manifestations of God's wrath against sin, and of His estimate

of the enormity of the act when a man deliberately violates the law of his Maker; and this, alone, ought to teach us a great horror for sin.

But the principal subject of the discourse is the punishment, if any, which is to be visited upon us on account of our sins in the future state. There can be no dispute about that which comes upon us now. Is there any punishment, suffering, misery, to be experienced in the future world on account of our sins? If reason were called upon to give an answer, without the aid of revelation, what would it be? I know of no way by which we could even approach a conjectural answer, except by judging of the future from what we know of the past. Go to the old man, who is trembling on the verge of the grave—has lived a long, eventful life—and ask him, Sir, judge of the future, if you are to have a future, by the past, and what can you expect it to be, the same God ruling over all? What would his answer be, unless it would be this—I have no reason to hope that it will be any better with me than it has been. On account of sin, I have suffered a great deal in this world. If the time ever comes that I shall be entirely free from sin, it may be that I shall be free from suffering; but, if my sins continue, I have no reason to doubt that my sorrow will continue in proportion. That would be the verdict of reason. But still, that would be a conjecture, and it could not furnish details as to the severity of the suffering that may be experienced hereafter; as to the nature of it, or as to the duration of it. All the details would be left in the dark. So then, if our question is to be answered at all, it must be answered by revelation; for no man without divine aid can look into the future world and tell us what is there. No man who ever went into the future world has come back to reveal what he experienced there. Hence, we are dependent upon the revelation that God has given us of that world, for all that we can possibly know on this subject. To it then we turn, and the question we have before us, in order that it may be fully answered, divides itself into some four or five:—

- First, Is there any punishment for the wicked after death?
- Second, If there is, when does it begin?
- Third, Is there a future, final and universal judgment, such as we have heard of?
- Fourth, What is to follow in the way of punishment, if anything, after that universal judgment?
- Fifth, and last, How long, if there is such punishment after the judgment day, will it continue?

I think, with these five questions answered, we will have the whole subject before us.

### **IS THERE ANY PUNISHMENT FOR THE WICKED AFTER DEATH?**

Is there then any punishment at all after death? Did you notice particularly some of the words which I read in our opening service from the 12th of Luke, where Jesus is addressing His own disciples, and says, “My friends, be not afraid of them who kill the body, but after that have nothing more that they can do.” They can take your body and burn it and dismember it, but that does not hurt you. They have no more that they can do which inflicts any pain upon you. “But, I will forewarn you whom to fear. Fear Him, who after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell.” We will not attempt to say, as yet, what the meaning of that clause is—what is meant by being cast into hell. But, can there be any mistake, my dear friends, when you read that passage, that there is something that God may do to a man after he is dead, called casting him into hell, which is worse than death? For the admonition is, do not be afraid of those who can kill you, and then can do nothing more: but, be afraid of Him, who after you are killed has power to cast into hell. Clearly, that is something worse than death, and which is to come after death. With this text alone our first question is answered, and answered by Him whose native home was that eternal world—Him who knew all things, and who had been appointed by the Father to be the Judge of

the living and the dead; for He Himself hath said, "Henceforward, the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto his Son." We are prepared then for the second question.

### **WHEN DOES THE SUFFERING BEGIN?**

When does the suffering mentioned by our Lord in these few words begin? From His own lips we will gather the answer. He once described, as you remember, the life, the death, and the future of two men; one, a rich man faring sumptuously every day, and clothed in purple and fine linen; the other, a beggar covered with sores, and brought and laid every day at the rich man's gate to receive the crumbs that fell from his table—no companions but the dogs that licked his sores. He says that the beggar died and was carried by angels and placed in Abraham's bosom. That is the death of a good man. He says that the rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades he lifted up his eyes and saw Lazarus afar off in Abraham's bosom, and begged, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." It began then with *him*, immediately after his death—just as soon as he died, in Hades. Hades, you know, is the place of departed spirits, where the spirits of men go when they leave the body, and where they remain until the resurrection. It is not an eternal state; it is temporary; it remains only till the final resurrection of all. There will be no Hades after that, for there will be no more separation of the body and the soul. We learn then from this passage of Scripture, that the wicked, as soon as their spirits leave the body, enter into torment. That need not surprise us. When a wicked man, who knows his God, and knows his Savior, and knows his Bible, but has trampled them under his feet, when, in the possession of his mental powers he comes to the verge of the grave, he is miserable—he can not fail to be. How full of horror and self-reproach! If we had no Bible to tell us, what would be our conclusion in regard to that man? If his spirit is so racked with agony, and self-reproach, and misery, as he comes up to the moment of death, what is there to stop that pain and anguish and self-reproach when his soul has passed out of the body? That which the Savior tells is true, then, is that which we would naturally conclude must be true. But, as I said, this torment in Hades, whatever it may be, is not eternal, for Hades itself is to be destroyed. It is to come to an end when the soul is gathered out of that place and brought back into its body, raised from the dead. That will be the end of Hades. This brings us then, to our third question.—

### **IS THERE A FUTURE, FINAL AND UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT?**

Is there, according to the word of God, beyond all uncertainties of interpretation, and all questions about the meaning of words, is there such a final judgment as we have heard and been taught to believe? Let me say that the word judgment is frequently used in the Bible, and on the lips of our Lord, with reference to matters that take place on this earth—for the decisions of the Divine mind in regard to matters that are here transpiring; and from this fact, many people have imagined that this is the only meaning attached to the word. But the Apostle tells us in the 9th of Hebrews, that it is "appointed unto all men once to die, and after that the judgment." In addition then to all the judgments of God that take place while men are living, there is a judgment *after* death, appointed to every man, which is just as universal and certain as death itself, if we can believe the plain and unmistakable language which I have just quoted. How long after death? We learn from the language of our Savior himself, that this final judgment is to take place after the resurrection from the dead. For, in familiar words, familiar to us all, He says, "The Queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it." "The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it." The judgment then in which that generation shall arise is one in which the Queen of the South will come up;

the people of Capernaum to whom Jesus spoke, will come up; the men of Nineveh will come up; and you and I will come up; for when *they* arise from the dead, according to the teachings of the Bible you and I will arise too. The same Lord has said, "The hour is coming when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth, they that have done good, to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation." In the third place, in regard to this judgment, we learn that it will be an universal one. "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory and all nations shall be gathered before Him." (John, v. 28-29 and Mat. xxv. 31). Here is a universal gathering of angels and of men; and I presume under the word angels are included all the intelligent beings that God has created in all the worlds that occupy illimitable space. They are to assemble together with all the men that shall have been born up to the time that that judgment takes place. Oh! what a gathering that will be! When he comes in his glory thus, and all nations are gathered before Him, He will separate them, as a shepherd divides his sheep from his goats, placing the goats on his left hand, and the sheep on his right. I might quote other passages of Scripture, but brethren, God does not have to speak twice in order to tell the truth. Our Savior ought not to have to repeat anything twice, in order that you and I may believe what He says when he uses plain language. Our question is answered. There will be at the time of the universal resurrection of all the dead, both good and bad, an universal judgment, a final and everlasting judgment of every human being. The Apostle John was granted a vision of that awful scene. You will go to the World's Fair to see the great sights that will be presented there, but the vision that came before the eyes of John transcended it as far as the heavens are above the earth. He says, "I saw a great white throne, and Him who sat upon it, from whose face the heavens and earth fled away, because there was no room for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before the throne, and the books were opened; and the dead were judged out of the things that are written in the books, according to their works. The sea gave up the dead that were in it; death and hades delivered up the dead that were in them, and they were judged, every one, according to his works." What a vision was that! The grandest sight that shall ever have been seen by mortal eyes until you and I, bye-and-bye, shall see in absolute reality the things which John saw in a vision. It is that same final judgment that we have heard of since we were little children, and there is no doubt about its reality.

#### **WHAT IS TO FOLLOW IN THE WAY OF PUNISHMENT AFTER THAT UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT?**

But now then, is there any punishment for sin after that? The men who died during all the long period of the world's history previous to that final resurrection, became miserable and went into misery, when they died. They have been brought up out of hades—soul and body re-united. They have been brought before the judgment seat, and now, what is the decision of the Judge? The same passage from which I last quoted declares that then shall the Judge say to them on His left hand, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." That is after the judgment; that is the punishment which is to follow the judgment. Do you remember how that punishment is set forth in the Bible? Everlasting fire. A lake that burns with fire and brimstone. The most excruciating torture, I believe, that human flesh can experience, is to be burned with fire, and that represents this suffering after the judgment.

Again, turning the vision, and taking another view of this eternal punishment, the Saviour says: "They shall be cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." By outer darkness, I presume He means darkness outside of all light, far beyond the reach of the rays of the sun, the moon, or the stars; far beyond the reach of that light that shall shine in the city of the living God, going out from the throne of God in the eternal world. What is more horrible than to be forever in the dark, to

have torment like that of fire burning you, and to hear no sound except the gnashing of teeth? Men gnash their teeth only when they are enraged against themselves, when they are tormented with anguish and self-reproach. Such, then, is the answer to our fourth question.

#### **HOW LONG, IF THERE IS SUCH PUNISHMENT AFTER THE JUDGMENT DAY, WILL IT CONTINUE?**

Now, finally, how long will that punishment which comes after the judgment, and which is described in these horrid terms, endure? Christ stamps the word “eternal” upon it. He says, these shall go into eternal life; these into eternal punishment; and thus He measures the life of the one by the same word which measures the punishment of the other, the word eternal. There has been a great deal of disputation about the meaning of that word, because it is often applied by a figure of speech to things that do not exist forever; but in this passage there is no ambiguity. As sure as the life into which the saints are called is unending, eternal in the sense of never coming to an end, so sure is the punishment unending; for they are measured by the same word, *eternal* life, *eternal* punishment. I was once engaged in a discussion with a man who denied the reality of eternal punishment, and his proposition in the debate was this, that all men shall finally be eternally holy and happy. Or, rather, leaving out the word eternal, all men shall finally be holy and happy. I asked him in the beginning of that discussion to tell us how long we would remain holy and happy, if we became so—whether it would be two hours, or two years, or ten years, or just a few minutes—how long would it last; and he did not answer. I called on him again, and again, and again, every time he arose to speak, to tell us how long we could be holy and happy when we once became so—to give us some idea about it, some hope that it would last at least a little while. Not a word could I get from him on the subject. And the reason why he would not answer, as everybody saw, was that the very same word describes the life that describes the punishment, and he would have to give up the position that he held. The word eternal sometimes is defined as meaning “*age lasting*.” And, as applied to this life, that would mean lasting as long as the age of a man from his birth to his death. Suppose that you understand it here to mean, that they shall go away into age-lasting punishment. How long would that be? How long, my dear friends, is an age after that time has come when no more human beings will ever be born, and no more will ever die—when all that exists, will exist world without end? How long is an age in that world, and what endurance is an age-lasting endurance? It certainly is endless. So, in whatever way you may look at the question, the punishment of the wicked after the day of judgment will endure as long as the life and blessedness of the righteous; and if we can believe the word of God, there is to be no end to either. Are you horrified at that thought? I think you certainly must be. Well, if you are, then how should you feel towards the sin which compels a God of love and mercy and infinite compassion to inflict such a punishment as that upon the sinner? What must sin be in the sight of the only being in this universe who is capable of appreciating it at its real enormity? And if sin be the horrible, the detestable thing that extorts from an infinite, merciful and gracious God such punishment as that, Oh! why should you and I be guilty of it? Why should mortal man ever gain his own consent to commit one single sin? And how amazing it is that men and women, who know of this, can consent to live in sin from day to day! Knowing that they have incurred this awful penalty; that if they were to die to-day, this would be their unending fate; how can they fail to reproach themselves for being sinners, and to fly away from it to the only means of escape found in Christ Jesus our Lord?

Is there any one here this morning who has given his life thus far to this horrible crime against his own nature and against his God; who has been treasuring up for himself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God? Oh! let me beg you to turn away from sin. Thanks be to His blessed name, however great the sins we have committed, however numerous they are, and however just the awful sentence that has been passed against us, there *is* a way of escape. There is peace in the

blood of the Lamb. There is provided in divine mercy a way by which your souls can be cleansed from guilt, and you can escape, eternal punishment. While we sing, I beg every one in the audience who has never done so, to come to Christ and be saved.

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