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# The Extinction of Evil

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*By Reverend William Sheldon*

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### *Extinction of Evil*

**By Reverend William Sheldon, Brodhead, Wisconsin.**

The origin of evil does not come within the range of the present discussion. That the God of the Bible is pronounced in His aversion thereto, except when the term is used to indicate calamity, is conceded by all. When the term “evil” is used to indicate sin, it never signifies an abstract principle that exists independent of evil personalities, capable of being measured by the yard, or weighed by the pound; but its existence involves the existence of sinners, and its perpetual existence would necessarily involved the interminable existence of sinful beings; and evil can continue to exist only while evil beings exist, either of the human or satanic type. Evil can be extinguished only by elimination, or extermination. But evil can be *eliminated* only by pardon, which can be obtained only by conforming to stipulated conditions, which are repudiated or disregarded by the majority of evil men; so divine elimination will terminate but a diminutive portion of evil; hence, extermination will be indispensably necessary to the extinction of evil; and it is impossible to exterminate evil, without exterminating evil doers; for the stream of evil will continue to flow until its fountain is obliterated: and that fountain is the sinning fraternity—Satan, and all affiliating with him. Since the obliteration of the fountain of evil is essential to the extinction of evil itself, this question is in order: Will evil ever be thus extinguished?

We need not spend a moment in arguing the present existence of evil, that bring frankly conceded by friends and foes alike; and if it were denied by any rash speculator, the gigantic form of evil would loom up, and sternly look its repudiator out of countenance, and shame him for the act. Evil is here—will it always remain? Is it necessarily eternal? It is admitted by all that evil is emphatically and supremely obnoxious to Deity, being in conflict with His revealed will, and averse to His holy character. But if evil really exists in our world, which was divinely pronounced “very good,” before evil came into it, and if God is utterly and irreconcilably averse to it, will He allow this hostile innovation to menace Him eternally? Will God be eternally antagonized by that which He abhors supremely? Will sin and sinners be defiantly co-eternal with Deity? Or will God at the close of a stipulated armistice, overwhelm His incorrigible foes with signal and irretrievable defeat, under an exterminating stroke of Deific power? These questions boldly come to the front, and persistently demand attention; they will not down—they refuse to be coerced into silence by the fiercest foes, or to be shackled by compromising friends. In the face of these stubborn facts we propound these pertinent questions:

I. Is evil to be eternal? Or, will it, on some principle, ultimately cease to exist?

(1) To assume that evil doers must necessarily exist as living intelligences forever, because of alleged inherent soul-immortality, is to assume just what lacks proof, and what is also in conflict with Scripture testimony concerning the nature of the human soul, as in the following examples: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4). “And none can keep alive his own soul” (Ps. 22:29). But immortality cannot die, while the prophet says that the sinning soul “shall die,” let the term soul

mean whatever it may—a being of life, or, life of a being—and it is sometimes used in the former sense, and sometimes in the latter.

(2) To assume that sinners must live forever in order to be punished in agreement with the divine plan, is to indulge in an untenable assumption, which is founded upon another incorrect assumption, which alleges that the sinner’s punishment is to be eternal in the process of infliction, instead of being eternal simply in its results, or eternal only in consideration of the eternal source from which it is to emanate. To assume that “everlasting punishment” is equivalent to everlasting punishing as a process, instead of a punishment that shall be everlasting in the sense of being irrevocable, is to assume that its nature will be the very opposite of what it is repeatedly announced to be by Bible witnesses. This leads to the question, What, then, is the nature of future and eternal punishment? What kind of punishment is due the incorrigible sinner after the arrival of the judgment, which shall assign him his doom? And a chorus of sacred voices ring out the response, “Death! Death!! Death!!!” The divine decree is death; and turning to heaven’s great statute book, where the penalty is always stated in explicit language, and in phraseology easy to be comprehended, we find that words are employed to depict the sinner’s final fate, which, if used in their literal sense, unmistakably indicate excision, and forestall the theory of ceaseless duration; and we moreover find them used amidst such environments and safeguards as to preclude the attachment of a figurative sense, and to require the ordinary meaning of the words employed, instead of allowing the application of a modern theological definition.

We instance samples of the words divinely employed to designate the ultimate fate of the unfaithful and the faithless classes at the day of doom. We begin with the word “death” and read from the Book of God: “The end of those things is death... The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:21-23). “And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15). “Shall save a soul from death” (James 5:20). “The second death” (Rev. 20:15). Not temporal death; that precedes the judgment, while the penalty-death, be that what it may, is not inflicted until after the judgment arrives. Not a “death in trespasses and sins,” for that also precedes the judgment, besides being the criminal states that renders one amenable to the penalty, instead of being the penalty itself. Not theological death, styled “the death that never dies,” for Christ, who died for us, to exempt us from the penalty-death, never died that kind of death—His vicarious death was of a different kind from that, and as literal in nature as the death due the sinner, though the mode of its infliction was not the same as it will be in the sinner’s case.

Jesus, not being a sinner Himself, dying not for Himself, but for the sinner, in advance of the judgment as the sinner’s substitute, to exempt the sinner from the penalty due at that epoch, having thus met the demand of the law—death—there was no law against His resurrection, He having paid the debt in full; but the sinner, who refuses or neglects to appropriate the death of Christ, must die for his own sins at the judgment, as really as though Christ had never died; and when the sinner dies for his own sins at the judgment, he can never be raised without reviving and unholy character after the execution of the penalty, and thus inaugurating rebellion again—an objection that did not stand in the way of Christ’s resurrection—so the sinner must remain dead through a vast eternity.

Christ “died for the ungodly,” not to exempt them from ordinary death, which is but a calamity that has been entailed upon the saint and the sinner alike, and which precedes the judgment; but He died to exempt them from the penalty-death, which is due at the judgment—“the second death,” or second decree of death, which decree in its execution does not always involved the necessity of dying a second time, for thousands of sinners will experience the infliction of the second decree of death who will not have died previously, being yet alive at the dawning of the day of “the perdition of ungodly men.” Christ also died the death due the sinner without previously experiencing ordinary death—thus in keeping with the contract made with the Father, the Lord “laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6), and “He poured out His soul unto death”—voluntarily laying down a life equivalent in value to the life of the race, just as one large gold coin is equal in value to thousands of small copper coins.

Jesus said: “I lay down my life... no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself” (John 10:17, 18). Hence, Pilate marveled that He was so soon dead. They had killed Him in heart, yet He circumvented them, so that really no man took His life—He laid it down Himself, to pay the sinner’s debt, not compulsively, but conditionally: but if the conditions are not met, the sinner must die for his own sins at the judgment—die a death as literal as that which Jesus tendered to meet the divine demand—the same in kind, though different in mode of infliction.

“Destruction” is another word divinely employed to portray the doom and destiny of the finally impenitent; and we have only to learn in what sense the word is employed in order to comprehend the many statements uttered concerning the future destruction of sinners. We give a few samples: In Matt. 7:13, Jesus speaks of “the way that leadeth to destruction;” but He cannot mean destruction in a moral sense, inasmuch as all who walk in that broad way are already destroyed in that sense;

besides, that kind of destruction, instead of being the penalty for sin, is rather the condition that calls for a penalty, and also exists before the penalty is due—this side of the judgment, and not after its arrival. We must not confound the crime that calls for a penalty with the penalty that the crime has called for—the one precedes the judgment, the other is not due till the judgment. More than all this, moral destruction is not divinely inflicted, but is self-inflicted, for it was said to backsliding Israel: “Thou hast destroyed thyself” (Hos. 13:9). But God will inflict destruction upon all who have thus destroyed themselves, for this very criminal act, if not repented of: “All the wicked will God destroy”—not morally, for they are already thus destroyed—but literally. To destroy them morally would be to put them into a state of sin for being in that state. God states His penalty for sin, not in a way to conceal His meaning, but in a way to reveal it; and to this end He uses human language in its ordinary sense, in the main, and all know the ordinary meaning of the word “destroy,” so often used to express the sinner’s final fate.

“Punishment” is another word used in the Scripture to indicate the divine penalty, and in some sense is pronounced “everlasting” (Matt. 25:46), or “age-lasting,” as the best critics render it; but if the process of infliction is meant, it must be remembered that Jesus restricts that to the “end of this age,” and the sinner will never see another age after this age expires. Jesus says: “The harvest is the end of the *aion*... As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this *aion*... They shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity and shall cast them into a furnace of fire” (Matt. 13:39-42). Here the fiery fate of the sinner is chronologically connected with “the end of this world”—“this *aion*,” or age; and the sinner’s impending fate is never interwoven with any other world or age. But not so with the future of the saints; they have the promise of another world—“the *aion* to come.” If the punishment thus restricted to the end of this age, and called “everlasting,” or age-lasting, really means age-lasting in the process of infliction, it would end with the close of the age, just as really as the “everlasting gospel” or age-lasting gospel will terminate with the close of the age. No one will claim that “eternal judgment” means an eternal process of judging men—never getting them fully judged: the process of judging is restricted to the close of the age, Jesus saying: “The same shall judge him at the last day” (John 12:47). So eternal punishment, though eternal or irrevocable in its results, will be restricted to this age in its closing period, for the process of infliction, where Jesus locates the “furnace of fire”—and we cannot change His location.

“Hell” is another word employed to set forth the final fate of evil doers. But the hell of final punishment is due at the great judgment day, instead of being a fiery realm already existing in some hitherto unknown altitude, latitude and longitude, prior to the judgment, which involves the conclusion that men are being punished before being judged—thus rendering a future judgment needless! The Greek term, *hades*, and its Hebrew equivalent, *sheol*—from which the term hell is frequently translated—are words that never signify a realm of consciousness, nor the place where the penalty is to be inflicted, but only the invisible depository of the unconscious dead, which must deliver up its victims before they are even judged; and the punishment due them comes after their judgment, and this judgment comes after the resurrection, for the Revelator says: “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it... And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: ...and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works; ...and death and hell [*hades*] delivered up the dead that were in them, and they were judged every man, according to their works” (Rev. 20:11-13). This *hades*, here rendered “hell,” contains only unjudged men; for when delivered up, “they were judged every man”—not a single man in the whole multitude having been judged previously—and this very *hades* of unjudged men, here rendered “hell,” is the only hell the “rich man” was ever in, for “in *hades* he lifted up his eyes;” and he can never be judged until *hades* shall deliver him up, with its other inmates, for then are all its occupants to be judged, even “every man.” And surely the rich man could not enter upon his final punishment before his judgment. Moreover, this *hades*-hell is not eternal in duration, but is finally to be engulfed in the lake of fire: “And death and hell [*hades*] were cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14). Can this mean that one eternal hell of punishment is to be plunged into another hell of punishment? How many hells of punishment are there for the same sinners? God’s Book recognizes but one, that being due after the judgment arrives—a hell for sinners raised at “the resurrection of damnation,” spoken of by Jesus (John 5:29).

II. If the extinction of evil is ever realized, it must be on the line of capitulation, or on the line of extermination. As capitulation is limited, something must be done with the portion who spurn it. The Apostle John affirms: “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). This can be accomplished only in part by gospel capitulation, for while the devil lives, he will continue to work in propagating evil, through human and satanic agencies. Only extermination by a stroke of divine power, at the end of the gospel armistice,

can bring the extermination of evil, by utterly exterminating evil doers, including the devil himself, for Christ has arranged that “through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil” (Heb. 2:14). The devil, who brought death into the human family, must finally take his own medicine, and die—leaving not a mourner behind; for all who affiliate with him now, will die with him when the penalty is inflicted at the judgment. The agent to be employed in exterminating evil by the destruction of evil doers is fire, at the close of probationary time, or at the coming of the day of the Lord, in the closing up of the present age. Take a few sample statements of Scripture in confirmation of this statement:

(1) The Apostle Peter says: “But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men... But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (2 Pet. 3:7-10). The same apostle had previously expressed the opinion that God will “reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Pet. 2:9), tantamount to saying that they are not to be punished before that day arrives; and indeed if they were previously punished, they must have been previously judged, and if previously judged, what need of a future judgment? A judgment after the execution of the penalty would be too bungling an arrangement to charge upon Deity. This coming judgment will not only bring “the perdition of ungodly men,” but is coupled with fire, and the same fire which Jesus calls “everlasting fire” (Matt. 25:41), or “age-lasting fire,” being inflicted upon the sinner after “the Son of man shall come in his glory” to separate saints from sinners. Jude speaks of the Sodomites, at the close of their age, as “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire,” in which experience he says they are “set forth for an example,” (Jude 7) or, as Peter says, concerning the same fire: “And turning the city of Sodom and Gomorrhah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly” (2 Pet. 2:6); and Jesus also speaks of the same fire in these words: “But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed” (Luke 17:29, 30). Jude says this was “eternal fire”—“eternal” in consideration of the eternal source from which it emanated, or eternal in its results, or eternal in the sense of lasting to the end of the age of the Sodomites. And Jesus says that it “destroyed them all;” while Peter affirms that it is an “ensample” or pattern of future punishment—a specimen of what “eternal fire” has done in the past, and will do in the future: and this sample is reliable.

(2) Jesus says of the sinner: “The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). The sinner’s final fate cannot precede his judgment; hence, is due in “the last day.” And Jesus pronounces it a fiery fate, akin to that of Sodomites, in the text just cited, saying, “Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed;” that is, as “eternal fire” came upon the Sodomites in the close of their age, so eternal fire will come upon a sinful world in the close of this age, producing an eternal extermination of all evil.

(3) The prophet Malachi pictures out the approaching scene of retribution in these words: “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven (the same word is also translated furnace); and all the proud, year, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch” (Mal. 4:1); agreeing with the statement of John the Baptist: “He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire,” or inextinguishable fire (Matt. 3:12). Here we have a clear prediction of the utter extinction of evil, by making a full riddance of evil doers in connection with a coming day of fire—a fire that will consume, as really as that sent on Sodom, and not preserve its victims.

(4) Jesus locates this fire chronologically “in the end of this,” *aion* or age, and calls it a “furnace of fire” (Matt. 13:40-42). And the wicked are threatened with fire in no age subsequent to the present age, for all evil will end with the close of the age which brings the human “harvest.” And “the harvest is the end of the world.”

(5) The revelator speaks of the same fire, due when the King of kings shall come, calling it a “lake of fire” (Rev. 19:15-19); and subsequently, just before introducing the new earth, he says: “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15). And there he locates the “second death”—the final penalty. God’s offered mercy having been refused or neglected by sinners, and being therefore unfit for “the world to come,” Jehovah will make this wise disposal of His foes by a fate culminating in death after the arrival of the judgment.

It is sometimes insisted that this view is incompatible with the scriptural doctrine of degrees in punishment; but we insist that this objection militates with equal force against the current theory of endless torment, or else is void of force; for degrees in future punishment must be graded either by its length of duration, or by its intensity. In the current theory it cannot be graded by duration, since all are made to suffer the same length of time; consequently it must necessarily be graded by intensity, if graded at all; and if God can eternally grade degrees in punishment on the principle of intensity, He certainly can

so grade them for a shorter time, and allow the punishment to culminate in death. Thus this objection furnishes its own solution.

But it is again objected that the sinner's fate must consist of death only, if including death at all; or else consist of torment only, if including torment at all. The fallacy of this claim will appear on a moment's reflection. As consistently might we say that the reward of the righteous must consist of eternal life only, if including that life at all—a shocking conclusion to arrive at, thus cheating the saints out of the kingdom of felicity and the crown of glory. There are degrees in future reward, graded not by the length of life, but by some of its tributary appendages—and divine supervision will adjust this matter with infallible precision and unerring accuracy, even “according to the deeds done in the body.”

Jesus, in His mission to earth, never came for the rescue of imperishable souls, or souls already possessed of “everlasting life,” but rather to reach and elevate a perishable race, now void of everlasting life. Jesus said: “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). So unless men believe in Christ, they must “perish” when the penalty is inflicted, instead of being preserved in perpetual agony in an endless hell; and unless they “believe” they cannot “have everlasting life;” and how can they live eternally in hell without it? Christ “died for the ungodly” to exempt them from penal death; but Christ's literal death cannot exempt deathless souls from literal death, for such souls could not die such a death anyway; and so a literal death could not exempt them from death of a literal nature; and Christ never died any other kind of death for any class of beings, to exempt them from any other kind of death. He died, not to exempt sinners from Adamic death, but rather from penal death, due at the judgment—a death just as literal as the death He experienced for their exemption therefrom.

The death-penalty due the sinner, if he spurns Christ, is due at “the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29), when coming from the *Hadean* prison to be judged, “the whole body” of the sinner “shall go into *gehenna* fire” (Matt. 5:22, 29)—a transaction not realized at the epoch of death, when the body is consigned to *hades*, void of fire; so “the resurrection of damnation” releases the body from *hades* preparatory to its consignment to *gehenna*, the future hell of punishment, where the “second death” will end rebellion against God; beyond which scene will loom up a sinless and deathless world, peopled with resurrected, immortalized and glorified saints, all evil having been extinguished forever, including the obliteration of its very fountain. Then we shall see and hear in reality, what the Revelator beheld only in vision, saying: “And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, ‘Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever’” (Rev. 5:13).

This carries us beyond the chronology of the hell taught in the Bible, to a time when evil is forever extinct, only the good being left; and then the redeemed world will joyfully resound the praise of Jehovah evermore, not a sinner being left alive to interrupt the sacred harmony by his plaintive wails or horrid blasphemies. Only praise will be heard when only saints shall be left alive.

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