

The Annihilation Theory

Passages Appealed To By The Annihilationists

**From: "Eternal Punishment" - *Studies in the Scriptures*
Series**

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"And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." [Mark 9:43]

Truth is one, consistent, eternally unchanged. Error is hydra-headed[1] inconsistent and contradictory, ever varying in its forms. So determined are men to persuade themselves that the eternal punishment of the wicked is a myth, the enmity of the carnal mind has devised a variety of ways of ridding themselves of this truth that is so hateful to them. "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Ecc 7:29). One of these inventions is the theory that at death the wicked pass into oblivion, and that after their resurrection and judgment at the Great White Throne, they are annihilated in the Lake of Fire. Incredible as this view appears, nevertheless it has had and still has many advocates and adherents; and what is even more unthinkable, the Word of God is appealed to in support of it. It is because of this that we make a brief notice of it here.

"Death"

The first class of passages to which they appeal are verses where "death" is mentioned. Death is regarded in the most absolute sense. Death they take to mean the passing from existence into nonexistence; an utter extinction of being. Death is applied to the soul as well as the body. How, then, is this error to be met? We answer: by an appeal to God's Word. The meaning of a word is to be defined not from its derivation, not from its employment by heathen writers, not from the definition supplied by a standard English dictionary, nor from the lexicons — but from its usage in the Holy Scriptures. What, then, does "death" mean as used by the Holy Spirit?

Let us turn first to 1 Corinthians 15:36: "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die." Here is the Holy Spirit's illustration and type[2] of the death and resurrection of a believer. Now, does the living germ in the seed sown become extinct before it brings forth fruit? Surely not. There is a decaying, of course, of its outer shell; and therein lies the analogy with the death of man — but the living germ within dies not, otherwise there could be no harvest. Death, then, according to this illustration of the Holy Spirit, is not annihilation.

The same illustration was used by our Lord. Said He, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die; it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (Joh 12:24). The stalk and ear of corn in harvest time are but the life-germ fully developed. So it is with man. The body dies; the soul lives on. Note how this comes out, unmistakably, in the Saviour's words as recorded in Matthew 10:28: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." The "soul" man is unable to kill! But God is able — and mark carefully the distinction — to destroy (not kill) both soul and body in hell.

"Destroy"

As the word "destroy" is another word misused and erroneously defined by the Annihilationists, a few words must be said upon it. As used in Scripture, the words "destroy," "destruction," "perish," etc., never signify cessation of existence. In Matthew 10:6, one of the principle Greek words for "destroyed" is rendered "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Those Israelites had not ceased to be, but were away from God! In Mark 2:22 the same word is translated "marred" in connection with the "bottles" of skins that the new wine burst. So, too, the word "perish" never signifies annihilation in Scripture. In 2 Peter 3:6 we read, "The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." The "world" that perished, whether the reference be to the pre-Adamic earth or the world destroyed by the Flood, was not reduced to nothing. When, then, Scripture speaks of the wicked as perishing and as being destroyed, it is in order to expose the error of those who assert that they have a gospel for those who die unsaved. That the wicked have "perished" excludes all hope of their subsequent salvation. 1 Timothy 5:6 tells us there is a living-death even now, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" — so will there be in eternity.

The absurdity and unscripturalness of Annihilationism is easily exposed. If at death the sinner passes out of existence, why resurrect him in order to annihilate him again? Scripture speaks of the "punishment" and "torment" of the wicked; but anyone can see that annihilation is not these! If annihilation were all that awaits the wicked, they would never know that they had received their just deserts and the "due reward" of their iniquities (Luke 23:41)! Scripture speaks of degrees of punishment for the lost, but annihilation would make this impossible; annihilation would level all distinctions and ignore all degrees of guilt. In Isaiah 33:14 we are told, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" So far from sinners being annihilated, they shall dwell with the devouring fire! Scripture speaks again and again of the "wailing and gnashing of teeth" of those who are cast into hell, and this, at once, gives the lie to those who affirm extinction of being.

FOOTNOTES

1. hydra-headed - Greek mythology: the hydra was a monstrous serpent with nine heads, and two would grow in place of one that was cut off.

2. type - a symbol representing something else with similar characteristics.
