

Man: His Nature and Destiny

by
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Chapter XI

CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY

WILL THE WICKED DEAD CEASE TO EXIST

We have already considered those phases of the doctrines of *Conditional Immortality* and *Annihilation* which relate to the soul, life, death, the *eons*, etc. In these they have much in common with *Universalism*. Both deny conscious existence in death. Both deny the accepted meaning of those terms rendered "everlasting" and "for ever and ever" in the *Authorized Version*. Both argue that God would be unjust to punish the wicked forever. But *neither* have concluded *from the Scriptures* that everlasting punishment is not taught there. They have concluded this from their own reasoning and *then* have sought to prove their conclusions from certain Scriptures. In doing so, however, they have been forced to ignore the *Holy Spirit's* usage of the terms in question and to pervert the plainest statements of the Word of God.

THE WIDE DISAGREEMENT AMONG THOSE WHO HOLD THAT THE UNGODLY WILL CEASE TO EXIST

In the camp of those who hold that the ungodly will finally cease to exist there are wide differences of opinion. Most of them who hold to *Conditional Immortality*, believe that man, being mortal, is destined, *in the nature of the case*, to pass out of existence and that only through union with Christ can he obtain so-called "immortality." Those who hold to *Annihilation*, on the other hand, believe that the ungodly will be exterminated or *put* out of existence. This, however, is only a very general distinction for, as we say, the differences of opinion in this school of thought are many and great.

Some believe that there will be a *single act* of annihilation, others a *process* of destruction; some, that it will be a *punishment*, others, a merciful *deliverance* from punishment; some, that the ungodly cease to exist at the *first* death, others, that this does not take place until the *second* death. But these last are disagreed again as to whether the second death will annihilate its victims *immediately* or *sooner or later* after sufficient punishment. Again, some believe that in the case of the unsaved the man *as such* will cease to exist at death but will be brought into existence again to be tried and destroyed in the second death,

while others hold that since (according to their theory) the ungodly cease to exist at death there can be no resurrection for them. Still others hold that "the soul survives the death of the body until judgment day, when God will destroy both soul and body of the wicked in the lake of fire."

WHY THESE TEACHINGS APPEAL TO THE UNSAVED

To the unregenerate man the doctrines of *conditional immortality* and *annihilation* doubtless hold a greater appeal than does that of *universal reconciliation*.

First, these teachings appeal more to his sense of justice. He knows he is a sinner. A sense of his blameworthiness has haunted him all his life and the Universalist theory that God meant him to be this way does not ring true. But in causing or permitting the ungodly to pass out of existence God at least seems to place the blame where it belongs and--suppose there is punishment to be borne at first, will not every day of torment bring him nearer to final deliverance from it?

Secondly, the unregenerate man does not *wish* to be in the presence of God. Like his father, Adam, he flees and hides from God. Indeed, Col. 1:21, referring to our former unregenerate state, says: "*You . . . were . . . alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works.*" The unsaved are unhappy and out of place in gatherings of believers; how much more would they be so in *heaven!* Thus most unregenerate men prefer to continue in sin if they can but be assured that, whatever punishment may lie ahead, they will finally pass out of existence.

In connection with all these theories, and that of *Universalism* as well, the sad fact is that in so many cases what men feel the Scriptures *ought* to teach blinds them to what they *do* so plainly teach.

THE ETHICAL QUESTION

The great question in the minds of all who deny everlasting punishment is how a just and loving God could allow any of His creatures to suffer forever, indeed, how He could allow evil to have a place in the universe forever.

We have already discussed the former part of this question. God's love and justice are not on trial before fallen man, whose conceptions of sin and righteousness must necessarily be subject, not merely to his limitations, but to his moral depravity. But God forever shut the mouths of all who would question His justice and love when, at Calvary, He demonstrated beyond all doubt that He is infinite in both; nor can He who is essentially infinite in all His attributes quench or lower one of them--His wrath against sin--to accommodate the sinner.

As to the latter part of this question: that God should allow evil to have a place in the universe forever is no more difficult a question, ethically, than that He should permit it to have a place at all, as it has had for so many centuries.

The theory that the ungodly will finally pass out of existence does not solve these problems; it only creates additional ones.

If God is to annihilate the wicked anyway, would it not be senseless cruelty to punish them at all? Further, if, as some believe, annihilation is the *penalty* for sin, then Christ cannot have paid the penalty, for He suffered untold agony to pay our debt. But if, on the other hand, annihilation is a merciful *deliverance* from further payment, why need Christ have paid for *all* man's sins? If God can overlook some sins for the Christ-rejector, how much more for Christ Himself? Of course some believe that annihilation is neither the penalty for sin nor a merciful deliverance from its further payment. They hold that *after* the unbeliever has fully paid for his sins he will be annihilated. Sir Robert Anderson gives the answer to this in his *Human Destiny*, P. 108:

"We are thus asked to believe in a God who puts forth His power solely to keep His creatures in existence until 'the uttermost farthing' of penalty has been exacted, and who then, when every question of righteous claim is settled, and love might pity and save, turns away to leave them to their fate. And this, too, on the plea that God is a God of love!"

Among those who hold the above theories there is always the tendency to view sin through the sinner's eyes and so to minimize it. Indeed, none of us, in our present state, can view sin as God views it. Furthermore, apart from the character or quality of the sin itself, sin becomes the more "exceeding sinful" in proportion to the position of the one sinned against. To smite my brother unprovoked would be an offense; to smite my mother would be a greater; to smite the ruler of the land, still a greater. It is evident, then, that any sin against God immediately takes on *infinite* proportions.

It should be noted, however, that there is a difference between the commission of sins and the rejection of grace. God has made provision for the former, but not for the latter. At least today, and among those to whom God's revelation has come, it is no longer the *sin* question but the *Son* question upon which salvation hinges.

". . . GOD COMMENDETH HIS LOVE TOWARD US, IN THAT, WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US" (Rom. 5:8).

"IN WHOM WE HAVE REDEMPTION, THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE" (Eph. 1:7).

To yield to sin is one thing, then; to spurn redeeming grace is quite another.

WHAT ABOUT THE HEATHEN?

But this leads us to another ethical question which the proponents of *conditional immortality* and *Annihilation* both profess, but fail, to answer: What about the teeming millions of heathen who have never heard of Christ? What will be their fate?

First, let it be said that the Bible was not written merely to gratify our curiosity. It was written to bring us God's plan and offer of salvation and, whatever the case of the heathen, *we* become responsible for accepting or rejecting that offer the moment it reaches *us*, and he who does not accept that offer thereby rejects it.

Thus, when God says that "*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him*" (John 3:36) it is obvious that those *to whom this message come* will be judged upon this basis.

With the heathen who have not heard, this, of course, is not so. They have *neither accepted nor rejected* this offer because *it did not reach them*. As Rom. 10:14 puts it:

". . . How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

But we must not conclude from this that the heathen are not accountable to God for *anything*, for while it is doubtless appropriate that we, redeemed sinners, often unfaithful in our responsibility toward the lost, should refer to those in pagan darkness as "poor heathen," the Scriptures describe their condition as not merely pitiable but *reprehensible*.

"FOR THE WRATH OF GOD IS REVEALED FROM HEAVEN AGAINST ALL UNGODLINESS AND UNRIGHTEOUSNESS OF MEN, WHO HOLD [LIT., HOLD DOWN] THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS;

"BECAUSE THAT WHICH MAY BE KNOWN OF GOD IS MANIFEST IN THEM; FOR GOD HATH SHOWED IT UNTO THEM.

**"FOR THE INVISIBLE THINGS OF HIM FROM THE CREATION OF THE WORLD ARE CLEARLY SEEN, BEING UNDERSTOOD BY THE THINGS THAT ARE MADE, EVEN HIS ETERNAL POWER AND GODHEAD; SO THAT THEY ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE"
(Rom. 1:18-20).**

Hence, of the heathen who have not heard of Christ, yea, who "have not the law," we read:

"FOR AS MANY AS HAVE SINNED WITHOUT LAW SHALL ALSO PERISH WITHOUT LAW"¹ (Rom. 2:12).

And this will take place, says Paul:

"IN THE DAY WHEN GOD SHALL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN BY JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL" (Ver. 16).

1 I.e., the Mosaic law.

Now the gospel committed to Paul is unique. It is called "the mystery" or "the secret." One phase of this secret is the great truth, unfolded in the Pauline epistles, that men never were or could be saved by religion or works *as such* and that now and always the redeemed have been saved by grace through faith in what God revealed *to them*² (Rom. 3:19-28; cf. Heb. 11:4, 5, 6, 7, 39).

² Now, of course, through faith in the finished work of Christ.

That the heathen multitudes have not accepted the revelation given to them is clear from Romans 1. Yet they will not share the greater guilt of those who have been offered and have rejected "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Our Lord expounded this principle when He said:

**"FOR UNTO WHOMSOEVER MUCH IS GIVEN, OF HIM SHALL BE MUCH REQUIRED"
(Luke 12:48).**

This same principle is brought out in Matt. 11:20-24, Rev. 20:12, 13 and other Scripture passages.

There is much that we do not know about the fate of the heathen, but there are basic facts of which we may be absolutely certain:

1. They will not be condemned unheard (Rev. 20:11-15).
2. They will be judged "every man according to their works" (Rev. 20:13).
3. They will be justly dealt with: "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" (Gen. 18:25).

Beyond this little is told us. In this connection Sir Robert Anderson says:

"What concerns us is not to theorize about the penalty of *sin*, but to take heed that we escape the 'sorer punishment' of despising grace. It were otherwise if Christianity gave those who reject it the alternative of falling back on the position held by all whom the revelation has never reached. But no such choice is ours" (*Human Destiny*, P. 160).

ARGUMENTS FROM SCRIPTURE

With regard to *Conditional Immortality* and *Annihilation* it is significant that the arguments which their champions draw from *Scripture* have to do, almost exclusively, with the interpretation of individual words and phrases. We have already considered some of these, but there are others also directly involved.

"LIFE"

Among those who hold that the unsaved will finally pass out of existence there is much confusion and misunderstanding about the various words rendered "life" in our Bibles.

Some, recalling the creation of man, point out that God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). This life, they argue, has been forfeited through sin, so that God withdraws it at death and the only way it can be recovered is by faith in Christ. There are, however, several variations to this theory.

But the life that God breathed into man's nostrils is not the same as that received by faith in Christ. Indeed, we have already seen that in the Greek there are two words for *life* which mark the distinction between these two. The one is *psuche*, or *breath of life*. This is obviously what God breathed into man's nostrils, and all living mankind, including those who have never trusted Christ, possess this life. The other is *zoe*, or *active life*, which, while it sometimes is also used of this temporal life, is the *only* word used for the life received by faith in Christ.

This is why Mr. Otis Q. Sellers has been so wrong in teaching that the life of 1 John 5:12 ("he that hath the Son hath life") is identical with that which God breathed into man's nostrils (*Word of Truth*, Vol. VI, P. 135). This life, he says, "comes to us with every breath we draw" (P. 136). In death, he further argues, "the breath of life returns to God from whence it came," adding that "in the matter of death, man is not superior to the beast" (Vol. IX, P. 95).³

But the life of 1 John 5:12 does *not* come to us with every breath; it comes to us by faith in Christ alone. Using this very word (*zoe*) our Lord said:

"THE WORDS that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and THEY ARE LIFE" (John 6:63).

"AND THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL, THAT THEY MIGHT KNOW THEE THE ONLY TRUE GOD, AND JESUS CHRIST, WHOM THOU HAST SENT" (John 17:3).

Using this same word regarding unsaved people who did indeed possess *the breath of life*, He said: "*Ye have no life in you*" (John 6:53) and concerning those who believed, He said:

"HE THAT HEARETH MY WORD AND BELIEVETH ON HIM THAT SENT ME, HATH EVERLASTING LIFE, AND SHALL NOT COME INTO CONDEMNATION, BUT IS PASSED FROM DEATH UNTO LIFE" (John 5:24).

How can *this* life, then, be that which we draw with every breath?

"IMMORTALITY"

1 Tim. 6:16, where we read that God alone "hath immortality," is frequently used to disprove the so-called "immortality of the soul." It is argued that since God alone is immortal, immortality may be obtained only by union with Him, through Christ.

But here again our friends confuse immortality with the eternal life imparted only to the redeemed.

The original word, *athanasia*, simply means *deathlessness*. It is used twice more in the

³ He is equally wrong when he argues that, since animals are also called "living souls" (Heb. of Gen. 1:24) they do not differ from us in the matter of life. Scripture nowhere tells us that God breathed into the nostrils of animals to give them life. Herein lies the great difference between man and the brute creation. By the divine inbreathing man has a link with God which the animals have not. Divine inbreathing and human respiration, then, are not the same.

New Testament Scriptures, in 1 Cor. 15:53,54, where we are told that "this mortal" will "put on immortality." But here the reference is clearly to the change to take place in our *bodies* at the rapture. "The dead shall be raised," says the apostle, "and we shall be changed" (Ver. 52). And, completing a parallelism, he continues: "For this corruptible [referring to the dead] must put in incorruptibility, and this mortal [referring to the living] must put on immortality" (Ver. 53). It is our *bodies* that will then become incorruptible and immortal. Indeed, in all six cases where the counterpart, "mortal," is used, the body is clearly referred to, as in "*mortal body*," "*mortal flesh*," etc. But the soul is never called mortal. It does not die as the body dies. It is immortal in the sense that it continues in conscious existence.

True, God alone is *essentially* immortal. It is "in Him" that "we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28) but this no more proves that the soul dies than that the angels die. God's immortality is *inherent* and *essential*; that of the soul, *derived* and *dependent*, but the soul *is* immortal in the sense described above. They that "kill the body . . . are not able to kill the soul" (Matt. 10:28).

It is on the basis of 1 Tim. 6:16 that some argue that *in the nature of the case* unregenerate men must finally pass out of existence. Yet most who hold this view also teach that the wicked dead will be raised again to appear before the great white throne and suffer the second death. But that which does not exist cannot be raised again, nor is the *second* death a natural law; it is a divine judgment.

Others, to escape this dilemma, insist that the lost cease forever to exist at the first death. But these are caught in a worse dilemma and are forced to do the most brazen violence to those passages which predict the resurrection of the wicked dead. Referring to the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15) one of them says: "Evidently a judgment of believers is in progress here" (*TFT*, Aug., 1953). Think of it! As though there could be any thought of believers being cast into the lake of fire! This same writer denies that the unsaved will "have to give an account of their works before God," since then "they would have to have a resurrection of some sort" (*TFT*, May, 1954).

According to this theory Rom. 8:1 would have to read: "There is therefore now no judgment to them that are *out* of Christ Jesus" and the wicked could go on in sin with no fear of judgment to come after this life is over. How contrary is all this to the plain words of Scripture:

". . . IT IS APPOINTED UNTO MEN ONCE TO DIE, BUT AFTER THIS THE JUDGMENT' (Heb. 9:27).

"DESTROY" AND "PERISH"

But do not such words as "destroy" and "perish," used in connection with the ungodly, imply that the lost will finally cease to exist?

Some insist that they do, that they indicate "absolute cessation of being." One argues that "the word *perish* is defined for us in 1 Cor. 15:18" where "it says that those who do not rise from the dead have perished."

An examination of the usages of this very word rendered "perish" in 1 Cor. 15:18, will show how falacious these statements are. Did the bottles of Matt. 9:17 cease to exist? Did Christ come to save those who did not exist? (Matt. 18:11). Did the woman of Luke 15:9 find a coin which did not exist? In each of these passages the word is *apollumi*, translated "perish" in 1 Cor. 15:18.

Several Old Testament words rendered "destroy" and "destruction" in our Bibles are further supposed by these teachers to support the doctrine of annihilation, but those words which *they* say describe the final doom of the wicked are also used to describe *temporal* judgments. Indeed, only in exceptional cases could they relate unquestionably to *final* judgment.

Nor do the various New Testament words rendered "destroy" at all bear the meaning of annihilation. The thief of John 10:10 does not come "to steal, and to kill, and to annihilate." Eating meat before a weak brother will not annihilate him (Rom. 14:15). The man of sin will not be annihilated at Christ's coming (II Thess. 2:8) for after that he will suffer torment in the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20).

The active English word "destroy" basically means *to ruin, to do irreparable injury, to render permanently unfit for intended use*. The Passive word "perish" simply means *to be destroyed or ruined*. The various Hebrew and Greek synonyms rendered by these two words are generally close to this in meaning and do *not* mean "annihilate" any more than do their English equivalents.

The book of Ecclesiastes is perhaps the stronghold of those who teach that the dead do not exist. Interestingly, however, even those passages which are singled out to prove this (e.g., 9:5) actually imply the very opposite--that the dead *do* exist. Furthermore the great conclusion of Eccl. 12:13, 14, is that man should fear God and obey Him, since He will bring every work into judgment. Surely this conclusion was not drawn from declarations that death is cessation of being.

"ETERNAL" AND "FOREVER"

It is true that *literally* the word *aion* means *age*, but some *finite* word necessarily had to be used to describe *infinite* duration of time; hence the idiomatic usage of *aion* in the Scriptures.

The idiomatic usage of *aion* is not inconsistent with its literal usage in passages where *particular aions* are clearly referred to. Where no particular *aion* is referred to *aionian* describes *endless duration*. It is used of persons and things which in their nature are endless, as God (Rom. 16:26) His glory (I Pet. 5:10) the Holy Spirit (Heb. 9:14) the

redemption wrought by Christ (Heb. 9:12) etc. In II Cor. 4:18 it is set in contrast with that which is *"temporal."* But the phrase *"to the aions of the aions"* most certainly describes *endless duration*. If the punishment of the wicked were temporary God would hardly have described its duration by using the words *"to the ages of the ages"* (Rev. 14:11; 20:10) *the very words* used to describe His own endless existence (Rev. 10:6).

And how else, we ask, could endlessness be *described*? What better expression could be used?

THE DAY OF SALVATION

We do not know *all* of God's purposes in the everlasting punishment of the ungodly. As *"in a great house"* there are all sorts of vessels, *"and some to honor, and some to dishonor,"* but all put to some use, perhaps this will be so in the universe in the ages to come.

Sir Robert Anderson, from whose *Human Destiny* we have quoted several passages points out that:

". . . nowhere has [God] said that it is for punishment alone [the ungodly] shall exist. If throughout creation, and even in the world which the microscope reveals to us, every creature seems to have its mission, why should we assume it will be otherwise in hell? It were but folly to press the matter further, and theorize about the possible employment of the lost; but may we not suppose that in the infinite wisdom of God there are purposes to the accomplishment of which even they will be made to minister?" (Pp. 173, 174).

It is one of the devices of Satan to seize upon the popular, but often degrading conceptions of hell and to demand whether such fiendish cruelty is not unthinkable of God. But the popular conception of hell is no more Scriptural than the popular conception of heaven.

We do know, however, that whatever their character, the flame and torment which await the ungodly are presented in Scripture in terms of the most solemn warning. Indeed, the very thought of *"the wrath of God"* is terrible to contemplate.

We thank God that as we write these lines He is still manifesting His love and mercy and grace. This is still the *"accepted time,"* the *"day of salvation."* Hence we beg those who are as yet unsaved to trust Christ as Savior before it is too late. We too, were once *"children of disobedience"* and *"children of wrath even as others."*

"BUT GOD, WHO IS RICH IN MERCY, FOR HIS GREAT LOVE WHEREWITH HE LOVED US,

"EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN SINS, HATH QUICKENED US TOGETHER WITH CHRIST . . .

"AND HATH RAISED US UP TOGETHER AND MADE US SIT TOGETHER IN

HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST JESUS:

"THAT IN THE AGES TO COME HE MIGHT SHOW THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE IN HIS KINDNESS TOWARD US THROUGH CHRIST JESUS" (Eph. 2:2-7).

And what He has done for the writer He is willing to do for the reader of this book. He is *"not willing that any should perish"* (II Pet. 3:9).

"BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED" (Acts 16:31).