

# Will a Loving God Permit Any One to Be Eternally Lost?

by H. A. Ironside

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"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).

OUR theme is in the form of a question, and the only place that we can find an answer to that question is in the Word of God. These poor minds of ours are utterly helpless in answering such a question. Men may reason as they will, but their reasonings will not change facts.

Apart from the revelation that God has given in His Word, we know nothing about what He will do in the eternal ages. One man may come to one conclusion, and another may come to a different one. We may say, "I think," or "I do not think," but our thinking will not alter the facts of the case. It is in the Word of God alone that this question is answered. Even if we fall back on mere human reason, it seems to me that no thinking person could come to the conclusion that a man could live in sin and die in sin, without suffering for his sins. "Be sure your sin will find you out" is an unalterable law of nature and of God.

Any argument that might be brought against a loving God permitting men and women to suffer throughout eternity because of sin, could also be brought against a loving God permitting men and women to suffer in this life because of sin. Joseph Cook, that stalwart New England fundamentalist, who lived before the word "*fundamentalist*" was coined, said something like this: One might imagine two angels talking together before the creation of the world, when they learned the divine secret that God was shortly to bring a universe into existence, and saying to each other:

"You have heard that God is going to create a world?"

"Yes."

"That He is going to have moral and intellectual beings in that world?"

"Yes."

"Not purely spiritual beings like ourselves, but beings with material bodies, and yet with minds and wills even as we angels have minds and wills of our own?"

"Yes, I have heard that such is His purpose. But can you answer this question? Do you think that our God will ever permit unhappiness to come into that world that He is going to create?"

"Oh, He certainly will not. Our kind, loving God will never permit unhappiness to come into the world that He is about to create."

"Do you think He will ever allow any of those creatures that He is going to bring into existence to act contrary to His holy will? Do you think He will ever permit sin to lift up its unholy head in the universe He is about to create?"

"Certainly not! Our God, our loving God, our holy God will never permit unholiness. He will never permit unrighteousness or wickedness to spoil that world that he is going to create."

"Do you think that God will ever allow man to suffer in pain and anguish in that world?"

"Oh, no! The world that God is going to create must of necessity be forever the abode of happy beings."

Can't you imagine angels reasoning something like that? But what are the facts? Six thousand years of human history, according to the chronology of the Hebrews, prove that a loving God did permit sin to come into the world, did permit wickedness to enter into this fair creation, and did permit pain, suffering, sorrow, broken hearts, unspeakable anguish, and even death to mar His fair creation.

### **The Reasonings of Men**

Now just as holy beings might have reasoned before the creation of the world that God, because He is loving, because He is good, and because He is holy, would never permit sin to spoil this world, and would never permit suffering and sorrow and anguish to come in, so men reason today that a good God will not allow the effects of sin to go on for eternity. But how can you and I tell what God will permit unless He is pleased to reveal Himself in His own Word?

People say today, for example, reasoning from man up to God, "You are a father; would you ever put one of your children in a place of intense suffering, if you could help it? Would you ever, willingly expose a child of yours to a fiery flame?"

Of course I answer, "No."

Then they ask, and they think they have good ground for what they are

about to say, "If you as an earthly father would not allow a child of yours to suffer in this way, can you believe that a loving God will cast people into everlasting fire because of their sins?"

And I have to answer, "The only way I have of knowing what God will do is by observing what He has done, and by turning to the Word to see what He has to say."

He has permitted men and women and even little children, during the ages of time, to suffer unspeakable anguish. He has permitted innocent little children to be born into the world, the victims of incurable diseases handed down from their parents, and these diseases are often the result of the sins of their forebears. Many of these little children come into the world and grow up never knowing a moment without suffering and pain. Would you have expected that of God, from your idea of who God is and what He should do? Yet here are the facts, and we have to face them.

The only way we can account for these facts is that God hates sin, and in order to make men realize what a fearful thing it is to sin against Him, He allows dreadful consequences to befall those who commit sin, consequences affecting not only the one who commits the sin, but affecting generations yet to be born.

Men object to the statement in the law, "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Deuteronomy 5:9). And yet the facts prove that the Word of God is right, for He does this very thing. Sin must be a fearful affront to a holy God, or He would never have allowed the awful sufferings and horrors that have darkened the history of mankind. He wants us to understand that sin is the vilest, the blackest, the most dreadful thing in the universe. His Word says, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

Right in this world some men's sins are open, going before them to judgment. Some men suffer unspeakably during this life because of their sins, but, on the other hand, there are other men of whom this is not true. There are others who sin just as grievously, and yet there is no evidence that their sin is followed with anything like proper judgment in this world. There are men who live in luxury and pleasure upon the earth, utterly indifferent to the conditions of those around them, living selfishly for themselves alone, and indulging in all kinds of sins. Yet as far as this life is concerned, the punishment does not fall upon them, but if they are not reaping the due punishment in this life, depend upon

it that in another world there will be a straightening up of the account, for it is written, "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after." What does this sentence mean if God did not intend us to understand that men are not through with Him when they leave this world impenitent? Some men's sins follow after them, and like the blood-hounds of hell which they are, they will track men down and drag them to the judgment bar of God where they shall give account of all the deeds done in the flesh.

### **The Time Element Involved**

But some say, "What sin can a man commit during his brief years on earth to deserve eternal judgment?" Have you ever stopped to consider that a man can commit a heinous crime in a very short time for which we think he deserves to be punished for all the rest of his natural life? Not very long ago a man of over seventy years of age came out of a prison in New England. Fifty years before he had been sentenced to that penitentiary for the horrible crime of murder. Because of his youth the law did not want to condemn him to be hung, so he was sentenced to prison. Because of his desire for gain, he was stirred to anger, and in a moment murdered a man, and no doubt he had many a month and year in which to repent of that crime. Yet society felt that it was only right that he should be shut away for fifty years. You see there may be no connection between the amount of time in which a man can commit a crime and the punishment that befits it.

Down in Kentucky there lived one of those fine southern gentlemen who had been left a widower. His wife, as she slipped away, left a darling baby who became all in all to him. He watched that child grow till she was a beautiful girl, and then on to budding young womanhood. By and by she returned from college, and was the very idol of his heart, and the apple of his eye. Then there came into that home a man who won the affection of that young woman and basely deceived her, luring her into grievous sin, ruined her sweet young life, and then cast her off, a poor brokenhearted girl.

That father had been what is called a Universalist, but when that poor girl came sobbing, broken-hearted, seeking her father's house after weeks of wandering, during which she had been afraid to go home, and told him what had happened, and when he saw the wreck that had been made of the idol of his heart and life, he exclaimed, with an oath, "If God Almighty hasn't a hell for fiends like the one who has wrecked my happiness and ruined my child, He ought to make one!" And this Book says He has one, and it declares that "whoremongers, and

sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars" shall have their part in it for all eternity.

Why is eternal punishment the result of impenitent sin? Our Lord Jesus has told us in Mark's Gospel. In Mark 3:28, 29, we read, "Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation." There you have it, the man who dies rejecting the Holy Spirit's testimony as to the Lord Jesus Christ is guilty of an eternal sin. That is why Scripture holds out no hope for his salvation in another world. The man who refuses the testimony the Holy Ghost has given concerning the Saviour's love, His marvelous atonement, and His wondrous grace has no other hiding place by which he may escape the wrath of a sin-hating God. And so I come back to the text with which we began, "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."

People say, "Oh, Paul or John or Peter may have believed this doctrine of eternal judgment for sin, but give me the words of Jesus—Jesus, the loving, gentle, tender, gracious, Galilean teacher—let me hear what Jesus says; His Word will be enough for me." Listen, my dear friends, no one ever spoke as seriously and as solemnly of the eternal consequences of sin as Jesus did. It is He who said, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire" (Matthew 18:9). It is Jesus who speaks so solemnly over and over again of that awful pit of woe, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48). It is Jesus who said of Judas, "It had been good for that man if he had not been born," but if there is any possibility of Judas ever being saved, even after the lapse of countless ages of misery, I submit that it would be good for him that he had been born. But Jesus said, "it had been good for that man if he had not been born." That man sold his Saviour! Suppose you do the same thing? That man companied with Jesus for three and one-half years, and yet sinned against the Holy Ghost in rejecting Christ. You have heard the gospel over and over again, and if you should reject Him too, could it not be said of you: "it had been good for that man if he had not been born"?

But now it is Jesus again who utters these words, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." You cannot find fault with the love of God, for it gave Christ, and thereby provided a way of salvation. God

is not holding you responsible because you are a sinner; you were born a sinner. You are not responsible because you have a sinful nature; you cannot help that. God is not going to cast you away from His presence simply because that corrupt nature has manifested itself in sin, for Christ has put away sin, and any man who will may be saved from his sin through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and receive a new nature. Why are men lost? The answer is clear: "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." You observe how this one sentence plucks up by the very roots two modern forms of error in regard to mankind.

There is Universalism. Is there any hope for a man who dies rejecting Christ in this life, being saved in the life to come? "*He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*" Jesus Himself could not have put it more plainly than that. In this world, God is pleading with sinners; He is offering them salvation, but if men reject His Son, it is the solemn declaration of Holy Writ, they *shall not see life*. There is no hope in another world for men who reject Christ in this.

But may it not be that the punishment for sin is nothing more than utter annihilation? "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." You cannot couple annihilation with abiding wrath. The wrath of God abideth on men because they are guilty of eternal sin, and so in the last chapter of our Bible we hear the seer saying, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Revelation 22:11). Character tends to permanency.

"Sow a thought, you reap an act;  
Sow an act, you reap a habit;  
Sow a habit, you reap a character;  
Sow a character, you reap a destiny."

God meant men to understand, and it seems to me there can be no question about it, that if men die in their sins, there is no hope that they will ever be brought into a state of harmony with Him whose grace they have spurned, or with the Saviour whose blood they have trampled under foot. And so we read, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). I know we live in a namby-pamby age when men make light of iniquity, but according to the Word of God, sin is a fearful affront to the Divine Majesty. To be uncleansed from sin means to die in sin, exist forever in sin, and be banished eternally from the presence of a holy God.

But, thank God, this is still the day of His grace. One would shrink from proclaiming a truth like this, if he were not permitted to proclaim the other truth: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," and so today, if you are unsaved, you may have eternal life by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. To believe on Him is to trust Him, rest your whole soul upon Him as your Saviour. and take Him as your Redeemer.

"My Redeemer, oh what beauties  
In that lovely Name appear;  
None but Jesus in His glories  
Shall the honored title wear;  
My Redeemer! oh, how sweet to call Thee mine.

"Sunk in ruin, sin and misery,  
Bound by Satan's captive chain;  
Guided by his artful treach'ry,  
Hurrying on to endless pain,  
My Redeemer plucked me as a brand from hell."

You can say this if you will come to Christ today.

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