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John 3: 36.

C. H. Mackintosh.

I have been thinking a good deal of late, on the last verse of the third chapter of John. It seems to me to furnish a most powerful answer to two of the leading heresies of this our day, namely, *Universalism* on the one hand, and *Annihilationism*, on the other: "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*."

The deniers of eternal punishment, as you know, are divided into two classes, differing from each other very materially. The one professes to believe that all will ultimately be restored and brought into everlasting felicity; these are the *Universalists*. The other is of the opinion that all who die out of Christ are annihilated, soul and body — made an end of thoroughly — will perish like the beast.

I think you will agree with me that John 3: 36 completely demolishes both these fatal errors. It meets the Universalist by the sweeping and conclusive statement that the unbeliever "shall not see life." It entirely sets aside the notion of all being restored and eternally saved. Those who refuse to believe the Son, shall die in their sins, and never see life.

But, were this all, the Annihilationist might say, "Exactly so; that is just what I believe. None but those who believe in the Son shall live eternally. Eternal life is only in the Son, and hence, all who die out of Christ shall perish — soul and body shall be made an end of."

Not so, says the Holy Spirit. It is quite true they shall not see life; but — tremendous fact! "The wrath of God *abideth* on him." This, beyond all question, gives a flat contradiction to annihilationism. If the wrath of God is to abide upon the believer, it is utterly impossible he can be made an end of. Annihilation and abiding wrath are wholly incompatible. We must either erase the word "abiding" from the inspired page, or abandon completely the notion of annihilation. To hold the two is out of the question.

Of course, I am merely now referring to this one passage of Holy Scripture; and truly it is enough of itself to settle any mind that simply bows to the voice of God, as to the solemn question of eternal punishment. But here is just the point. Men will not submit to the teaching and authority of Holy Scripture. They presume to sit in judgement upon what is and what is not worthy of God to do. They imagine that people may live in sin, in folly, in rebellion against God, and in the neglect of His Christ, and after all go unpunished. They take upon them to decide that it is inconsistent with their idea of God to allow such a thing as eternal punishment. They attribute to the government of God what we should consider a weakness in any human government, namely, an inability to punish evil-doers.

But the Word of God is against them. It speaks of "*unquenchable* fire" — of an "*undying* worm" — of a "*fixed* gulf" — of "*abiding* wrath" What, I would ask, is the meaning of such words, in the judgement of any honest, unprejudiced mind? It may be said that these are figures. Granted that the "fire," the "worm," and the "gulf" are figures, but figures of what? Of something ephemeral — something which must, sooner or later, have an end? Nay; but something which is eternal, if anything is eternal.

If we deny eternal punishment, we must deny an eternal anything, inasmuch as it is the same word which is used in every instance to express the idea of endless continuance. There are about seventy passages in the Greek New Testament where the word "everlasting" occurs. It is applied, amongst many other things, to the life which believers possess, and to the punishment of the wicked, as in Matthew 25: 46. Now, upon what principle can any one attempt to take out the six or seven passages in which it applies to the punishment of the wicked, and say that in all these instances it does not mean for ever; but that in all the rest it does? I confess this seems to be perfectly unanswerable. If the Holy Ghost, if the Lord Jesus Christ Himself had thought proper to make use of a different word, when speaking of the punishment of the wicked, from what He uses when speaking of the life of believers, I grant there might be some basis for an objection.

But no; we find the same word invariably used to express what everybody knows to be endless; and therefore if the punishment of the wicked be not endless, nothing is endless. They cannot, consistently, stop short with the question of punishment, but must go on to the denial of the very existence of God Himself.

Indeed, I cannot but believe that here lies the real root of the matter. The enemy desires to get rid of the Word of God, of the Spirit of God, the Christ of God, and God Himself; and he craftily begins by introducing the thin end of his fatal wedge, in the denial of eternal punishment; and when this is admitted, the soul has taken the first step on the inclined plane which leads down to the dark abyss of atheism.

This may seem strong, harsh, and ultra; but it is my deep and thorough conviction; and I feel most solemnly impressed with the necessity of warning all our young friends against the danger of admitting into their minds the very shadow of a question or doubt as to the divinely established truth of the endless punishment of the wicked in hell. The unbeliever cannot be restored, for Scripture declares "he shall not see life." Moreover, he cannot be annihilated, for Scripture declares that "the wrath of God abideth upon him."

How much better and wiser and safer it would be for our fellow men to flee from the wrath to come than to deny that it is coming; or that, when it does come, it will be eternal.