

Future Punishment: Its Character and Duration

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There is no point within the whole compass of Divine truth where human thoughts and opinions are of any value. But at no point is it more necessary to rigidly exclude them than from the solemn subject which is now to occupy us. Immediately the punishment of sin is in question we are all of us alert and inclined to make our voices heard. We are none of us disinterested spectators, but rather in the position of a criminal in the dock being tried for his life. Now a criminal is never an unprejudiced judge of his own case, neither are we in this matter of future punishment. So let us begin by recognizing the very natural warp of our fallen reason in relation to this theme, and resolving to close our minds to our own thoughts as to what *ought to be*, and to listen to the plain declarations of what is *going to be*, given to us in Scripture by God the Judge of all.

It may be well to begin at the very beginning and enquire if the Bible indicates that there is to be such a thing as punishment *at all*? There are not wanting those who would do away with the whole idea in relation to God's government of His creatures, just as there are also those who are always inclined to bewail the bitter fate of the assassin when brought face to face with justice, whilst having scant sympathy, or none at all, to spare for his victim!

Read carefully Romans 2: 1 to 16, and you will find that Scripture testifies with no uncertain

sound to the reality of future punishment. There is such a thing as "the judgment of God." That judgment is going to be expressed in "wrath" in the coming "day of wrath." It is going to probe beneath the surface of things in that day and deal with "the secrets of men." And if any should enquire what exactly "wrath" may mean, we are told in further detail when it is said that to those contentious, and who do not obey the truth, God will render "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" (ver. 9), and that without any respect of persons.

There is nothing surprising in these statements. They are guise after the analogy of those dealings of God's government which are visible to us. He most evidently has attached temporal penalties to sins, which are often clearly to be seen in this life. Why not, then, the full and proper penalties in the life to come?

Another question now comes up for settlement. Granted that the future punishment of sin is a reality, what is to be its character? Is it remedial and reformatory, or is it penal and retributory? A very important question, for the answer to it will go a long way towards settlement of the subsequent question as to its duration. If punishment in the life to come is with the object of making its subjects better, it stands to reason that it cannot be for ever.

Is future punishment spoken of in Scripture as an instrument of reformation? Is hell to be a great penitentiary, designed to effect that betterment in recalcitrant mankind which the preaching of grace never effected? We unhesitatingly answer, No.

Not only do we answer, No, but we go further and assert that at no time do we find reformation produced by God's dealings in judgment. In Egypt God dealt with Pharaoh, increasing the severity of His strokes. Was his heart softened? No, it was hardened. Later, God dealt in the same way with His apostate people Israel as He said He would in Leviticus 26. After foretelling some of the dreadful calamities to come He says in verse 23, "If ye will not be reformed by Me in these things . . . then will I . . . punish you yet seven times for your sins." Were they reformed? No; the extremes" punishments indicated came upon them as a nation. Concerning future judgment we read in Revelation 16: 11 how men will blaspheme the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and will not repent of their deeds.

Today, thank God, men do repent, but why? Because, as Romans 2: 4 tells us, it is "the goodness of God" that leads to repentance. But it is this very chapter that asserts that if men do not suffer the goodness of God to take them by the hand and lead them to repentance, they will find themselves seized by the severity of God and haled to judgment.

We do not need to go outside that passage to discover what character the judgment of God bears. It is said to be "against them which commit such things," for they are "worthy of death" according to the last verse of Romans 1. The sinner is asked if he thinks that he shall "*escape* the judgment of God." This language is not that which befits reformation but points clearly to retribution.

The fact is, this idea that hell is a kind of penitentiary, which is hardly distinguishable from the purgatory of the Romanist, cuts right at the roots of the Gospel. Salvation never has been, is not today, and never will be by reformation. Salvation is by faith and on the ground of the penalty and retribution of sin having been borne — of old typically in connection with the sacrifices, now borne really and fully by the sacrifice of Christ Himself upon the Cross.

Salvation by a reformation which, it is claimed, the fires of hell will produce, might be conceivable IF it were accomplished today by a reformation which the Gospel produces. Since, however, it is to-day only to be found in the bearing of sin's righteous penalty and retribution by

another, the Lord Jesus Christ, it could only be found in eternity by a similar bearing of the penalty, and this will never be; for Christ will not suffer again, and no sinner can take up the penalty and exhaust it. If a sinner passes under sin's penalty, under it he must remain forever.

No Scripture referring to future punishment treats it as a matter of reformation, and a great many of the passages are so worded as clearly to negative that idea, and show it is a matter of retribution. As an instance of this latter class take 1 Peter 4: 17, 18. That Apostle asks, "If it [judgment] first begin at us [Christians] what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God? and if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" He evidently knew well enough that no one with any show of truth could turn round and say, "Why, of course, the *end* of those that obey not the Gospel will be just the same as that of those who obey: the ungodly and sinners will ultimately appear, refined by age-long fires, in the same heaven as the godly and the saints."

That which lies ahead of the ungodly and sinners as their end is "judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10: 27).

Now we approach the fateful question: —

Does Scripture indicate that this coming fiery indignation of God against sinners will be forever? The answer is that it clearly does so.

Take as one example out of many scriptures, Matthew 25: 46. The words we allude to were spoken by the Lord Himself as the climax of His description of the judgment He will execute on the living nations assembled before Him, as He begins His millennial reign. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

That particular judgment, then, will have a twofold issue. It will be either life or punishment. Life in its full and proper sense will embrace all that aggregate of privileges, relationships, and blessings, the crown of all being the knowledge of the Lord, of which the earth will then be full. Punishment will embrace all those woes and penalties which are appropriate to the state of sin in which men generally are found, and to the individual sins of those in question, including the crowning one of the rejection of the Divine testimony through those whom the King acknowledges as His brethren. And both the life and the punishment are *eternal*. No one seems anxious to prove that eternal life is not eternal. Multitudes labour to explain that eternal punishment is not eternal. Why? It is simply a case of the prisoner in the dock revolting against his sentence! Apart from such prejudice — natural enough, but very fatal if indulged in — there is no reason for denying to eternal in the first half of the sentence what is freely admitted as to it in the second. Scripturally both parts stand or fall together.

This scripture is only one out of many that might be cited, from the solemn warnings of our Lord as to the worm that never dies and "the fire that never shall be quenched," in the Gospels, to the awful words as to "the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death," in the last book of the New Testament. There really is no doubt as to what is the testimony of Scripture on the point, though the attempts to juggle with its words and make them give another voice have been, and still continue to be, without number.

With all the ingenuity that has been expended and wasted in this way only two alternatives to eternal punishment have ever been imagined. The one is that in some way or other all will finally be saved. This is known as "universalism." The other is that man naturally just dies as the beasts that perish and that endless being and existence are only his as born again and in Christ. This is known as "annihilationism" or the "conditional immortality" theory.

Now one verse of Scripture — John 3: 36 — utterly destroys both theories. We read: " He that

believeth not the Son shall not see life." The universalist theory is that ultimately, no matter how remote the age may be, he *shall* see life. The Lord Jesus says he shall NOT. He added, "But the wrath of God abideth on him." According to the annihilationist he is non-existent and therefore not there for the wrath of God to abide upon. According to the Lord Jesus he is there and upon him the wrath abides, without any hint of a moment when it ceases to abide.

The Lord Jesus thus, with Divine foreknowledge, negated these specious theories of a later age.

By this denial of the two rival theories, therefore, we come back to the solemn fact, so abundantly stated in a positive way in Scripture, that there is such a thing as future punishment, that it is in the nature of solemn retribution for sin, and that once falling it endures for ever.

That the punishment of sin should be eternal is a dreadful thought. Can it be defended as just, and therefore right?

It is truly a dreadful thought, and the reality will be more dreadful still; but, then, sin is a dreadful thing. Who can measure sin's demerit? Can we embrace within our finite minds the full bearing, the uttermost ramifications, of an act of lawless rebellion against God? No, indeed. That would be as impossible as to embrace within our arms the solar system of which this earth is a very insignificant part. Who are we, then, to form and express opinions as to what may be the just and proper punishment to fit the case?

God is "the Judge of all the earth" and He will do right. Let us quit the folly of attempting to pronounce upon what He ought to do, and rather pay attention to what He has stated in the Scriptures that He *will* do; for that, and that alone, will ultimately stand.

Is it, however, quite certain that the Greek word rendered "eternal" and "everlasting" in our version really has the force of "endless"? May it not just mean "age-long," as its derivation would indicate?

As we have before observed, the derivation of a word settles little or nothing; it is its usage that matters. It is quite true that the Greek adjective *aionios* is built up from *aion* — an age, hence *age-lasting* may have been one of its meanings. The word, however, acquired the sense of *eternal*, and this is its sense in Scripture, as a good concordance will easily show you. It is used in regard to God, the Spirit, salvation, redemption, life, and many other great verities of the faith. So that we may say that except it does denote endlessness we know of nothing at all that is endless.

One of the most conclusive passages we can cite on this point is 2 Corinthians 4: 18, where the Apostle contrasts the things which are seen with those not seen. The former, he says, are "temporal," the latter, "eternal."

Here the word eternal **MUST** be used in the sense of "having no end," otherwise it would be no true contrast to temporal, which means "having an end." The seen things may endure for many thousands of years — for ages, as we speak. They may be age-long but *they have an end*. The unseen things abide not for ages merely, but for ever. They have no end.

Here, then, we shall surely find used the true and proper word for eternal if the Greek language possesses it, and not merely a word meaning "age-lasting." We turn up a Greek Testament, and what word do we find? —

Could proof be stronger that in Scripture usage *aionios* means *eternal* in its true and proper

sense?

Some people think that eternal punishment cannot be reconciled with the fact that God is love, and therefore they refuse to believe it. Is there any force in this argument?

None whatever. The Scriptures reveal equally both facts, so that those who speak thus are really levelling their accusation of inconsistency at the Bible.

As a matter of fact, however, there is no inconsistency at all, but the very reverse. The strongest possible abhorrence is quite consistent with the strongest possible affection; we would indeed go further and say it is inseparable from it. It is impossible to regard any one with deep love and not heartily hate all that imperils that person in any way.

There is nothing, therefore, incompatible with God's love in His declared purpose to segregate all that is evil in eternity. At present good and evil seem hopelessly mixed in this world. A day is coming in which they will be finally disentangled. Good will bask in the sunshine of His favour. Evil will lie eternally beneath His frown. Thus, evil, eternally shut up in its own place, and enduring its just penalty, will no longer be able to threaten the peace and blessing of God's redeemed creation.

No one regards the isolation of small-pox patients or the still more sorrowful life-isolation of lepers as measures incompatible with benevolence amongst men. Why, then, object to God acting with similar intent in eternity?

Hell is sometimes painted in such lurid colours that minds are revolted. Is there foundation for this?

Imagination has, we fear, often run riot with this solemn subject, and people sometimes mistake Dante's *Inferno* for the hell of the Bible. This has furnished a useful handle to those who would deny the whole subject. The Bible speaks as ever in the language of reserve and restraint, yet the glimpses it gives are full of terror and it evidently is not intended that they should be otherwise.

To be incarcerated in sin's great prison-house for all eternity in conscious torment will be a *fearful* thing, and it is the kindness of God that plainly warns us of sin's consequences.

Moreover, it is evidently God's way to have a memorial of sin's effects, even when those effects are otherwise not visible. During the millennial age, for instance, when the face of the earth will be smiling with abundant fruitfulness, and mankind will be richly blessed, there will be certain spots of which it is written, "they shall not be healed; for they shall be given to salt" (Ezek. 47: 11), and also in some way "the carcasses of the men that have transgressed" against the Lord will be preserved so that men shall "go forth and look, upon" them (Isa. 66: 23, 24). It will be salutary for those blessed in that delightful age to have before them reminders of sin's former havoc both in nature and amongst men.

May there not be an analogy between God's action in such matters and His action in the far greater matter of an eternal hell? Who can affirm that the solemn doom of the lost in the lake of fire may not have some such service to render throughout eternity?

Is it clear from Scripture that the souls of men are immortal? The doctrine of eternal punishment can hardly be maintained apart from that.

In Scripture the adjectives "mortal" and "immortal" are applied to man's body, and we do not find the phrase "immortal soul." Yet it is quite clear that the soul, or spiritual part of man, survives death.

Our Lord said, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul" (Matt. 10: 28). He used here a word of strong force, meaning "to kill utterly or entirely." A feeble man may easily thus kill the body of another, but the soul is immortal and eludes him. The Lord added, "fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell," and here He changed the word and used another, which means, "to mar or ruin, as regards the purpose for which a thing exists." It is the word used for perish in John 3: 16, and for the perishing of the bottles in Matthew 9: 17. It is also used in Matthew 27: 20, when we read of the leaders persuading the multitude "that they should ask Barabbas and *destroy* Jesus." A very clear proof this, that destruction does not mean annihilation.

The whole verse teaches, first, that the soul is not mortal like the body, and, second, that in hell God intends not to annihilate, but to bring down into ruin, the whole man, both soul and body.

The soul, therefore, IS immortal, for man has it in connection with spirit, receiving it by the Divine in-breathing as Genesis 2: 7 records. Becoming a "living soul" in this fashion, man is not as the beasts which perish.

There are many who argue that just as death is ceasing to exist, so the lake of fire, which is the second death, must imply total cessation of existence. Is this reasoning sound?

Viewed as a piece of reasoning, it is about as feeble and fallacious as can be. Were we to reply in reasoning vein, we should simply observe that if death is ceasing to exist then *there can be no second death*. You can't cease to exist in any proper sense, and yet exist so as to cease to exist in a second death! What strange things men will say in their efforts to overthrow the plain truth of God.

Yet, superficially, the statement has the appearance of being a real objection. This is derived from the giving of a false value to one of the great words of Scripture, viz. *death*.

This word occurs first in Genesis 2: 17, and Genesis 3 is the record of how the death sentence fell on our first parents. Its use in the Bible is constant until we reach the last chapter but one of the New Testament, where we find "a new heaven and a new earth" where "there shall be no more death," and yet at the same time 'the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.' Now, right through, we affirm that death NEVER means "ceasing to exist," but always has the force of *separation*: either, the separation of the creature spiritually and morally from God, in which sense men are "dead in trespasses and sins;" or the separation of soul and spirit from the body, which is death physically; or yet again the final separation of the whole man, if unrepentant and unsaved, from God and all that is good and bright and worth possessing, in the lake of fire, and that is the second death.

The first use of the word *death* in Genesis 2 and 3 clearly bears this out. God threatened Adam with death on the day of his disobedience. Adam disobeyed and lived on to the age of nine hundred and thirty years. Was it, then, an idle threat? Not at all. The day he sinned he died, in the first sense of the word, i.e. he became totally separated and estranged from his Maker, "dead in sins." His physical death was deferred inasmuch as the Lord brought death that day upon some other denizen or denizens of the gar 'en and clothed the guilty sinners with their skins. Centuries after, physical death supervened. Adam then passed out of all touch with this world, but he exists as regards God. As the Lord Himself said, "all live unto Him" (Luke 20: 38).

We therefore repeat with emphasis: *Death, in Scripture, does not mean "ceasing to exist."*

So many people, apparently true Christians, cannot accept the teaching of eternal punishment. Is it of such great moment whether they do or whether they do not?

Seeing that all the items of God's truth are not so many isolated fragments, but one whole, each item being like a stone of an arch, it matters much. Knock out one stone and you never know which will go next.

Suppose that, after all, eternal punishment is a mistake, then whichever alternative view we adopt we must at least conclude that sin is a matter much less grave than we had supposed; that its demerit, though perhaps considerable, cannot be *infinite*. That being so, we need not suppose that an *infinite* sacrifice is needed to atone for it, nor, consequently, that it must be necessary for a Person of *infinite* worth and value to become that sacrifice. Logically, therefore, we can abandon without difficulty the great truth of Atonement by blood, and of the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. We could quite consistently and conveniently become of Unitarian persuasion.

And as a matter of fact and history, it is to Unitarianism, full-blown, that the denial of eternal punishment has always led, though not all advance to the final conclusions with giant strides.

That is why the denial of eternal punishment is a matter of such gravity.

The Work and Indwelling of the Spirit of God.

The third Person of the ever-blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit of God, is presented to us in Scripture as the One from whom the living energies of the Godhead proceed. He is first mentioned in Genesis 1: 2 as moving in creation and there giving effect to the Word of God. He is last mentioned in Revelation 22: 17 as energizing "the bride" and producing in her heart a suitable response to the Bridegroom, who presents Himself as "I, Jesus."

These references to Him are highly significant. The first gives us, by way of analogy, a broad outline of His great work in connection with redemption, viz. *giving effect to the Word of God*. The last indicates the full and blessed effect of His indwelling, viz. *producing in saints a full and adequate response to the revelation made and to the relationships which love has established*.

To God the Father belongs initiative. All purpose, counsel, direction, are His. To God the Son belongs administration — the execution of the Divine purpose whether in creation, redemption, or judgment. To God the Holy Ghost belongs the energy all-pervading that, acting always in perfect harmony with the Father's counsels and the Son's administration, produces the desired effects whether upon matter in creation, or upon the souls and ultimately the bodies of saints in connection with redemption.

The redemption work of the Lord Jesus has been done *for us*. The work of the Holy Spirit is being wrought in us. The former is accomplished quite outside ourselves at the Cross. It is set before us as an object of our faith; we look out at it. We speak of it, therefore, as an *objective* work, and truth connected with it as *objective* truth. The latter is something accomplished within us. Instead of regarding it as an object before us we find ourselves the subjects of it. We speak of it as a *subjective* work, and truth connected with it as *subjective* truth.

It is first of all necessary to observe that the Spirit's work precedes His indwelling Man, in the flesh, i.e. in his unconverted condition, is no fit dwelling-place for the Spirit of God. This was foreshadowed both in the consecration of Aaron's sons (Exodus 29) and in the cleansing of the leper (Leviticus 14). In both there was observed this order: first, the bathing with water; second, the

application of blood; and third, the anointing with oil, typical of the fact that the Spirit can only be given when man comes under the action of the water and the blood. In other words, it is only when the Spirit has applied the water in new birth, and the blood in the knowledge of redemption, that he can take up His abode.

New birth is clearly the work of the Spirit of God. A man must be "born of water and of the Spirit" (John 3: 5). The water, figurative of the Word, is the instrument or vehicle: the Spirit, the Agent or Power. In 1 Peter 1: 22-25 the same great truth is referred to, only the emphasis is rather laid upon the Word of God which is living and abiding, and which presents itself to us today in the Gospel which is preached unto us, and the Spirit of God is referred to as Him by whom we have purified our souls in obeying the truth. In John 3 the chief emphasis is laid upon the Spirit's operation, and it is declared that He begets His like — "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

In John 3 there is the clearest possible distinction between "a man . . . born again" and "the Son of Man . . . lifted up." We just say this to emphasize once more the point that new birth, the beginning of the Spirit's work, is not something done outside of us, at the Cross, once for all, but is wrought in us each individually one by one.

Now, new birth having been carried into effect with any given person, there is produced within that which is born of the Spirit, and is spirit as to its nature, contrasted with flesh, the nature we possess as born of Adam's race. This new spirit-nature is called the "inward man" in Romans 7: 22, and as prompted by that inward man the believer "delights in the law of God." Verses 7-25 are the detailing of an experience and marked by the constant repetition of the pronouns "I," "me," "my," consequent upon the distress occasioned to the speaker — the "I" — by the conflicting desires of the two natures, "the flesh" on the one hand, "the inward man" on the other. But amongst the lessons learned in the course of that experience is this, that God (and therefore also faith in us) only recognizes the new spirit-nature; the old is utterly worthless. In it is no good (Rom. 7: 18), and in the Cross it has been condemned (Rom. 8: 3).

The horticultural process of grafting is a good illustration of this point. The gardener selects a stock sapling quite worthless in itself and condemns it by cutting it hard back till hut the stump remains. He then inserts the twig of value, let us say some dessert apple. When once the graft is effectively made he no longer in any way owns the old nature. He always speaks of the tree by the name of the engrafted twig. It is the same tree as far as its identity goes. The two natures are there as experience will prove, but the new nature is the *dominant* nature and the *acknowledged* nature of the "born-again" tree.

No matter what the time or dispensation, this tremendous operation of the Spirit of God — new birth — is necessary if a soul is to have to do with God in blessing; consequently in all ages men have been born again. The indwelling of the Spirit of God is a blessing, however, quite characteristic of the present age. Before it could be, redemption had to be accomplished; sins must be expiated and sin condemned. The Cross of Christ having become an accomplished fact and Christ having been raised and glorified, the Spirit was given as recorded in the second chapter of Acts.

In Old Testament times not only were men born again of the Spirit of God, but also in different cases He came upon them in extraordinary power, energizing them for special service. In these cases He came for a brief occasion with no thought of permanency. Hence, when the Lord Jesus promised the "Comforter," as recorded in John 14, John 15, and John 16, He spoke of Him as coming to be "in you" and "that He may abide with you for ever."

When the Spirit of God descended, as recorded in Acts 2, He came in a twofold way. First, He

indwelt each individual saint present on that occasion. This plainly appears in the narrative. There were the "cloven tongues like as of fire," signaling His presence, and it adds, "it sat upon each of them." But, secondly, His coming meant the formation of the Church as 1 Corinthians 12: 13 tells us, "by one, Spirit are we all baptized into one body," and having formed this "one body" — the Church — He also made it the house of God by His indwelling. We are "built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2: 22). This larger indwelling is not mentioned in Acts 2, though perhaps it is symbolized in the fact that the "sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind . . . filled all the house where they were sitting."

If we enquire a little more closely as to the way the Spirit of God indwells the individual believer, we find that He comes bearing a threefold character. He is the Seal, the Earnest, and the Anointing as stated in 2 Corinthians 1: 21, 22.

As the Seal He secures us for God and marks us out as His (see Eph. 4: 30).

As the Earnest He is the pledge and fore-taste of all those blessed realities which are yet to be ours in the day of glory (see 2 Cor. 5: 5; Eph. 1: 14)

As the Anointing, or Unction — this latter word is used in 1 John 2: 20 — He endows the believer with the capacity to apprehend and enjoy the things of God (see 1 John 2: 27), and also empowers for worship and the service of God. This is illustrated in the case of the Lord Himself (see Acts 10: 38)

Then, again, if we take such a chapter as Romans 8, we find that the Spirit of God, so graciously given to the believer, is identified with and characterizes the new state formed in him by His power: i.e. the Spirit of God is the energy of that new being and nature which is the believer's as the result of the new birth. It can be said, therefore, that "the Spirit is life" (v. 10). He is also "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" and exerts His controlling power or "law," thus setting the believer free from "the law of sin and death" (v. 2). Indeed, that remarkable chapter sets the Spirit before us as filling various other capacities in connection with the practical life of the Christian, but these we have not space to deal with particularly, for we must turn to the work He does as indwelling the believer.

He works, as we have seen, before He indwells, grappling with the conscience, breaking the will, and finally producing new birth. This is something like the building of a suitable house for Himself. Then He takes up His abode so that the very body of the believer becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 6: 19). But we must not suppose that this is the end of everything. As indwelling He still works.

In the chapters in John already referred to (14, 15, 16), the Lord Jesus especially emphasized the *teaching* of the Spirit as regards His disciples. He would "teach" them "all things." He would "guide" them "into all truth." This was doubtless true in an especial degree of the apostles to whom He was speaking, inasmuch as they were to be the original depositories of the further revelations which are now contained in the Epistles. Admitting this, it is still true in a general sense of every believer, even the most recently converted — the babe — as 1 John 2: 27 shows. The teaching work of the Spirit goes deeper than the mere imparting of information. He instructs so effectually that the believer not only knows mentally but is also possessed by the things that he knows. They are made living and operative in his life.

Then He strengthens as well as instructs. The Apostle prayed that the Ephesian saints might be "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3: 10). The inner man itself is the fruit of the Spirit's earlier working, but it needs to be strengthened if Christ is to dwell in the heart by faith.

Connected with this is His transforming work as spoken of in 2 Corinthians 3: 18. We Christians, in contrast to Israel, have before us the unveiled glory of the Lord, and not the partial and veiled glory of the law as reflected in the face of Moses. Beholding that unveiled glory, we are changed or transformed "into the same image" from one degree of glory to another, "as by the Spirit of the Lord."

How vast the range of all those things which have come to light in the revelation which has reached us! Each item has its own peculiar glory which streams toward one central point of focus — the Lord Jesus Christ. His glory shines everywhere, and we may see it without a veil between. As we behold, we are transformed by the Spirit's power, and transformed into the same image, the very character of Christ being thus produced in us. This is perhaps the very crown and climax of the Spirit's work in the believer. He transforms, writing upon the fleshy table of the heart, Christ in His character, or moral features. This is to be supplemented and . completed, when the Lord comes again, by the body of the saint being brought into conformity to Christ's body of glory. The Lord Himself will do this, it is true (Phil. 3: 21), but not apart from the Spirit of God, for God will "quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you (Rom. 8: 11).

Of great importance, too, are all the Spirit's operations in connection with the Church as distinguished from those that concern the individual believer. He is the true Vicar of Christ upon earth. He is the "Servant" who is commissioned not only to carry the Gospel invitation but also to "*compel* them to come in," according to the parable in Luke 15. He it is who gives those gifts to various members of Christ's body which are to be for the profit of all. The gifts are varied, but "all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will" (1 Cor. 12: 11), and as chapter 14 of that Epistle shows, He is the One to preside and control in the assemblies of the saints. He is here not to exalt Himself but to magnify Christ, nevertheless He is to be honoured and given His place as indwelling the saints who are God's house. To ignore His presence in the assembly of God, or to treat Him as a nonentity there, by men (though well-meaning) usurping His place and functions, is a serious sin.

How vast a subject is that of the work and indwelling of the Spirit of God! We have but hastily and imperfectly sketched its outlines.

How may a believer know that he has received the Holy Spirit?

By the fact that he is a believer, assuming always, of course, that he has heard and believed the gospel of the risen Christ. The Ephesian believers were sealed with the Holy Spirit after that they believed, or "having believed" (see Eph. 1: 13); This verse gives us definitely the order which is always observed. First, they "*heard* the word of truth the gospel of your salvation"; second, they believed it; third, they were *sealed with the Spirit*.

We have in the Acts the historic record of cases where the Spirit was received. Take, for example:

- (1) The disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 2).
- (2) The Samaritans (Acts 8).
- (3) The Gentiles — Cornelius and his friends (Acts 10 and Acts 11).
- (4) The twelve men at Ephesus (Acts 19).

In each case there are differences as regards details, such as baptism, the laying on of hands, and speaking with tongues. There are good reasons for these differences on which we do not dwell, but

evidently it is impossible in the face of them to formulate rules and say, for instance, that baptism must take place before the Spirit can be received: — the third case negatives that. On the other hand beneath these surface differences there is the divine order of *hearing, believing,* and the *sealing* of the Spirit, verified in each case of the four. The fourth case emphasizes that what is heard and believed must be the full gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ. It was because the twelve men had not heard and believed *this* that they had not received the Spirit.

Ought there not, however, to be some very definite outward signs when the Spirit is received; something that makes so great a gift manifest to all?

There ought to be, and are, definite signs when the Spirit is received, but not necessarily of a sort to be noticed by sight or hearing. The fact that a new convert looks up to God as his Father is a sign that the Spirit is received (see. Rom. 8: 15). So also is the fact of the Bible becoming a new book to such (see 1 Cor. 2: 11-14); and many other such things could be specified. These are far more important than such things as speaking with tongues.

True the outward signs were much in evidence in apostolic times, inasmuch as then God was publicly accrediting the Church which He had just founded. Now that stage is over and it is these less sensational and more hidden and important things which abide. We may draw an analogy between this and the human body, the most important and vital organs of which are hidden away beneath the surface.

Take speaking with tongues just mentioned: some insist that unless this takes place the Spirit of God is not received. How does Scripture bear on this?

Quite effectively. What we have just pointed out bears on it. So also does the fact that in the six cases of the Spirit's reception recorded in Acts, three make no mention at all of speaking with tongues. So also does the fact that speaking with tongues is much alluded to in 1 Corinthians 12, where the whole argument of the Apostle turns upon the point that though the Spirit of God is *one*, yet the gifts or manifestations which proceed from Him are *many* and *various*; and that to one member of the body was given one gift such as prophecy, to another member another gift such as speaking with tongues.

At the end of the chapter (vv. 29 and 30) a number of questions are raised. No answer is given because it is so obvious. "Are all apostles?" he asks. Clearly, *No*. "Are all prophets?" *No*. "Do all speak with tongues?" Just as clearly, *No*. Are all Christians members of Christ's body by baptism of the Spirit? Yes. Do all the members speak with tongues? *No*. A clear scriptural refutation of this erroneous idea.

Does the believer receive the Holy Spirit in order that he may use His influence for God?

The Scriptures do not put it just in that way. The Spirit of God is a Person. He wields an incalculable influence. Yet it is as a *Person* He indwells.

Now whether we consider Him as indwelling the individual believer or the whole Church, as the house of God, we find Him supreme and sovereign in His actions. He is not given to us as a power or influence at our disposal, but rather that we may be at His disposal.

This comes clearly to light in the history of the Apostle Paul. He started on his missionary career because "The Holy Ghost said . . ." (Acts 13: 2). Later, he was "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach

the Word in Asia" and assaying to go into Bithynia, "the Spirit suffered them not" (Acts 16: 6, 7).

What is it to be filled with the Spirit?

It is to be so fully under the control of the Spirit of God that He becomes the source of all the believer's thoughts and actions, and also the energy in which they are carried into effect.

In the Acts of the Apostles we find that on special occasions one or another were filled with the Spirit (Acts 4: 8 and 31; Acts 7: 55; Acts 13: 9 and 52). He possessed them with especial completeness so that the emergency might be met in the full power of God.

Yet we find in Ephesians 5: 18 the exhortation "be filled with the Spirit," and this addressed to all saints in that city, so that evidently it is something that each saint should know and experience for himself and not something only attainable by the few.

If it be further asked — Why then is it so little known? the answer we fear is — because with most of us the flesh is so often unjudged, and therefore active, that the energies of the Spirit are largely taken up in counteracting its power. Galatians 5: 17 speaks of the Spirit and flesh as "contrary the one to the other," and we are to walk in the Spirit and so "not fulfil the lust of the flesh." The first step towards being filled with the Spirit is so to walk in the Spirit that the flesh is judged, and quiescent with the sentence of death upon it in a practical way.

What is it that "grieves" the Spirit of God, and what "quenches" Him?

What grieves Him is anything which dishonours Christ, or deviates from His control. The Scripture runs, "Grieve not the *holy* Spirit of God" (Eph. 4: 30). He will therefore be grieved by anything unholy. Not grieved away, for the next words are: "whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption," i.e. the day of the redemption of our bodies at the coming of the Lord.

To grieve Him is to lose the practical benefits of His presence, for He then turns His energies to grieving us into a recognition and confession of the evil that we may be restored to communion.

"Quench not the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5: 19) is an exhortation not to hinder His action through the prophets or others in the assemblies of the saints. The next verse or two shows this. The Spirit indwelling the Church claims the right to order its gatherings and let not men under any pretext interfere with or quench His voice. This is an exhortation generally disregarded in Christendom where organizations and liturgies have been instituted in order to place everything under the control of a man or men. Under such circumstances the free and sovereign action of the Spirit would be resented as an intrusion and promptly suppressed.

What, in a word, is the great mission of the Spirit of God?

To glorify Christ. See John 16: 14. In the preceding verse it is said, "He shall not speak of Himself," that is, of His own initiative. He has taken the place of serving the interests of Christ and hence His activities are along that line and He has not come to make Himself the prominent feature. For this reason we do not find either prayer or worship in Scripture ever addressed distinctively to the Holy Spirit. He is rather the Inspirer of both in the believer.

This is important because some have taken up matters in such a way as to form a kind of "cult" of the Holy Spirit. He is talked about; His operations within the believer are analysed and discussed and even systematized in people's minds; the effect of all this being that such get hopelessly occupied with

themselves, their own state, and the operations of the Spirit — whether real or fancied — within; and Christ is eclipsed.

Such self-occupation is a serious evil, and totally opposed to the real ministry of the Spirit. He is here in the Church to glorify Christ and lead our souls to Him.