

The Eternality of Hell – by Jonathan Edwards

Matthew 25:46, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment.”

IN this chapter we have the most particular description of the day of judgment, of any in the whole Bible. Christ here declares that when he shall hereafter sit on the throne of his glory, the righteous and the wicked shall be set before him, and separated one from the other, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. Then we have an account how both will be judged according to their works: how the good works of the one and the evil works of the other will be rehearsed, and how the sentence shall be pronounced accordingly. We are told what the sentence will be on each, and then we have an account of the execution of the sentence on both. In the words of the text is the account of the execution of the sentence on the wicked or the ungodly, concerning which, it is to my purpose to observe two things.

I. The duration of the punishment on which they are here said to enter: it is called everlasting punishment.

II. The time of their entrance on this everlasting punishment, viz. after the day of judgment, when all these things that are of a temporary continuance shall have come to an end and even those of them that are most lasting — the frame of the world itself, the earth which is said to abide forever, the ancient mountains and everlasting hills, [and] the sun, moon, and stars. When the heavens shall have waxed old like a garment and as a vesture shall be changed, then shall be the time when the wicked shall enter on their punishment.

Doctrine. — The misery of the wicked in hell will be absolutely eternal.

There are two opinions which I mean to oppose in this doctrine. One is that the eternal death with which wicked men are threatened in Scripture, signifies no more than eternal annihilation: that God will punish their wickedness by eternally abolishing their being.

The other opinion which I mean to oppose is that though the punishment of the wicked shall consist in sensible misery, yet it shall not be absolutely eternal, but only of a very long continuance.

Therefore, to establish the doctrine in opposition to these different opinions, I shall undertake to show,

I. That it is not contrary to the divine perfections to inflict on wicked men a punishment that is absolutely eternal.

II. That the eternal death which God threatens is not annihilation, but an abiding sensible punishment or misery.

III. That this misery will not only continue for a very long time, but will be absolutely without end.

IV. That various good ends will be obtained by the eternal punishment of the wicked.

I. I am to show that it is not contrary to the divine perfections to inflict on wicked men a punishment that is absolutely eternal.

This is the sum of the objections usually made against this doctrine: that it is inconsistent with the justice, and especially with the mercy, of God. And some say [that] if it be strictly just, yet how can we suppose that a merciful God can bear eternally to torment his creatures.

First, I shall briefly show that it is not inconsistent with the justice of God to inflict an eternal punishment. To evince this, I shall use only one argument, viz. that sin is heinous enough to deserve such a punishment, and such a punishment is no more than proportionable to the evil or demerit of sin. If the evil of sin be infinite, as the punishment is, then it is manifest that the punishment is no more than proportionable to the sin punished, and is no more than sin deserves. And if the obligation to love, honor, and obey God be infinite, then sin which is the violation of this obligation, is a violation of infinite obligation, and so is an infinite evil. Again, if God be infinitely worthy of love, honor, and obedience, then our obligation to love, and honor, and obey him is infinitely great. — So that God being infinitely glorious, or infinitely worthy of our love, honor, and obedience, our obligation to love, honor, and obey him (and so to avoid all sin) is infinitely great. Again, our obligation to love, honor, and obey God being infinitely great, sin is the violation of infinite obligation, and so is an infinite evil. Once more, sin being an infinite evil, deserves an infinite punishment. An infinite punishment is no more than it deserves. Therefore, such punishment is just, which was the thing to

be proved. There is no evading the force of this reasoning, but by denying that God, the sovereign of the universe, is infinitely glorious, which I presume none of my hearers will venture to do.

Second, I am to show that it is not inconsistent with the mercy of God, to inflict an eternal punishment on wicked men. It is an unreasonable and unscriptural notion of the mercy of God, that he is merciful in such a sense that he cannot bear that penal justice should be executed. This is to conceive of the mercy of God as a passion to which his nature is so subject that God is liable to be moved, and affected, and overcome by seeing a creature in misery, so that he cannot bear to see justice executed: which is a most unworthy and absurd notion of the mercy of God, and would, if true, argue great weakness. — It would be a great defect, and not a perfection, in the sovereign and supreme Judge of the world, to be merciful in such a sense that he could not bear to have penal justice executed. It is a very unscriptural notion of the mercy of God. The Scriptures everywhere represent the mercy of God as free and sovereign, and not that the exercises of it are necessary, so that God cannot bear justice should take place. The Scriptures abundantly speak of it as the glory of the divine attribute of mercy, that it is free and sovereign in its exercises, and not that God cannot but deliver sinners from misery. This is a mean and most unworthy idea of the divine mercy.

It is most absurd also as it is contrary to plain fact. For if there be any meaning in the objection, this is supposed in it, that all misery of the creature, whether just or unjust, is in itself contrary to the nature of God. For if his mercy be of such a nature that a very great degree of misery, though just, is contrary to his nature, then it is only to add to the mercy. And then a less degree of misery is contrary to his nature (again to add further to it), and a still less degree of misery is contrary to his nature. And so, the mercy of God being infinite, all misery must be contrary to his nature, which we see to be contrary to fact. For we see that God in his providence, does indeed inflict very great calamities on mankind even in this life.

However strong such kind of objections against the eternal misery of the wicked, may seem to the carnal, senseless hearts of men, as though it were against God's justice and mercy, yet their seeming strength arises from a want of sense of the infinite evil, odiousness, and provocation there is in sin. Hence it seems to us not suitable that any poor creature should be the subject of such misery, because we

have no sense of anything abominable and provoking in any creature answerable to it. If we had, then this infinite calamity would not seem unsuitable. For one thing would but appear answerable and proportionable to another, and so the mind would rest in it as fit and suitable, and no more than what is proper to be ordered by the just, holy, and good Governor of the world.

That this is so, we may be convinced by this consideration, viz. that when we hear or read of some horrid instances of cruelty, it may be to some poor innocent child or some holy martyr — and their cruel persecutors, having no regard to their shrieks and cries, only sported themselves with their misery, and would not vouchsafe even to put an end to their lives — we have a sense of the evil of them, and they make a deep impression on our minds. Hence it seems just, every way fit and suitable, that God should inflict a very terrible punishment on persons who have perpetrated such wickedness. It seems no way disagreeable to any perfection of the Judge of the world. We can think of it without being at all shocked. The reason is that we have a sense of the evil of their conduct, and a sense of the proportion there is between the evil or demerit and the punishment.

Just so, if we saw a proportion between the evil of sin and eternal punishment, i.e. if we saw something in wicked men that should appear as hateful to us, as eternal misery appears dreadful (something that should as much stir up indignation and detestation, as eternal misery does terror), all objections against this doctrine would vanish at once. Though now it seem incredible, [and] though when we hear of such a degree and duration of torments as are held forth in this doctrine and think what eternity is, it is ready to seem impossible that such torments should be inflicted on poor feeble creatures by a Creator of infinite mercy. Yet this arises principally from these two causes: 1. It is so contrary to the depraved inclinations of mankind, that they hate to believe it and cannot bear it should be true. 2. They see not the suitability of eternal punishment to the evil of sin. They see not that it is no more than proportionable to the demerit of sin.

Having thus shown that the eternal punishment of the wicked is not inconsistent with the divine perfections, I shall now proceed to show that it is so far from being inconsistent with the divine perfections, that those perfections evidently require it; i.e. they require that sin should have so great a punishment, either in the person who has committed it, or in a surety. And therefore with respect to those

who believe not in a surety, and have no interest in him, the divine perfections require that this punishment should be inflicted on them.

This appears as it is not only not unsuitable that sin should be thus punished, but it is positively suitable, decent, and proper. — If this be made to appear, that it is positively suitable that sin should be thus punished, then it will follow that the perfections of God require it. For certainly the perfections of God require what is proper to be done. The perfection and excellency of God require that to take place which is perfect, excellent, and proper in its own nature. But that sin should be punished eternally is such a thing, which appears by the following considerations.

1. It is suitable that God should infinitely hate sin, and be an infinite enemy to it. Sin, as I have before shown, is an infinite evil, and therefore is infinitely odious and detestable. It is proper that God should hate every evil, and hate it according to its odious and detestable nature. And sin being infinitely evil and odious, it is proper that God should hate it infinitely.

2. If infinite hatred of sin be suitable to the divine character, then the expressions of such hatred are also suitable to this character. Because that which is suitable to be, is suitable to be expressed. That which is lovely in itself, is lovely when it appears. If it be suitable that God should be an infinite enemy to sin, or that he should hate it infinitely, then it is suitable that he should act as such an enemy. If it be suitable that he should hate and have enmity against sin, then it is suitable for him to express that hatred and enmity in that to which hatred and enmity by its own nature tends. But certainly, hatred in its own nature tends to opposition, and to set itself against that which is hated, and to procure its evil and not its good, and that in proportion to the hatred. Great hatred naturally tends to the great evil, and infinite hatred to the infinite evil, of its object.

Whence it follows that if it be suitable that there should be infinite hatred of sin in God, as I have shown it is, it is suitable that he should execute an infinite punishment on it. And so, the perfections of God require that he should punish sin with an infinite, or which is the same thing with an eternal, punishment.

Thus, we see not only the great objection against this doctrine answered, but the truth of the doctrine established by reason. I now proceed further to establish it by considering the remaining particulars under the doctrine.

II. That eternal death or punishment which God threatens to the wicked, is not annihilation, but an abiding sensible punishment or misery. — The truth of this proposition will appear by the following particulars.

First, the Scripture everywhere represents the punishment of the wicked, as implying very extreme pains and sufferings. But a state of annihilation is no state of suffering at all. Persons annihilated have no sense or feeling of pain or pleasure, and much less do they feel that punishment which carries in it an extreme pain or suffering. They no more suffer to eternity than they did suffer from eternity.

Second, it is agreeable both to Scripture and reason to suppose that the wicked shall be punished in such a manner that they shall be sensible of the punishment they are under: that they should be sensible that now God has executed and fulfilled what he threatened, what they disregarded and would not believe. They should know themselves that justice takes place upon them, that God vindicates that majesty which they despised, [and] that God is not so despicable a being as they thought him to be. They should be sensible for what they are punished, while they are under the threatened punishment. It is reasonable that they should be sensible of their own guilt, and should remember their former opportunities and obligations, and should see their own folly and God's justice. — If the punishment threatened be eternal annihilation, they will never know that it is inflicted. They will never know that God is just in their punishment, or that they have their deserts. And how is this agreeable to the Scriptures, in which God threatens, that he will repay the wicked to his face, Deu. 7:10. And to that in Job 21:19, 20, "God rewardeth him, and he shall know it; his eyes shall see his destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty." And to that in Eze. 22:21, 22, "Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I the Lord have poured out my fury upon you." — And how is it agreeable to that expression so often annexed to the threatenings of God's wrath against wicked men, and ye shall know that I am the Lord?

Third, the Scripture teaches that the wicked will suffer different degrees of torment, according to the different aggravations of their sins. Mat. 5:22, "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the

judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.” Here Christ teaches us that the torments of wicked men will be different in different persons, according to the different degrees of their guilt. — It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, for Tyre and Sidon, than for the cities where most of Christ’s mighty works were wrought. — Again, our Lord assures us that he that knows his Lord’s will, and prepares not himself, nor does according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knows not, and commits things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. — These several passages of Scripture infallibly prove that there will be different degrees of punishment in hell, which is utterly inconsistent with the supposition that the punishment consists in annihilation, in which there can be no degrees.

Fourth, the Scriptures are very express and abundant in this matter: that the eternal punishment of the wicked will consist in sensible misery and torment, and not in annihilation. — What is said of Judas is worthy to be observed here, “It had been good for that man if he had not been born;” Mat. 26:24. — This seems plainly to teach us, that the punishment of the wicked is such that their existence, upon the whole, is worse than non-existence. But if their punishment consists merely in annihilation, this is not true. — The wicked, in their punishment, are said to weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth; which implies not only real existence, but life, knowledge, and activity, and that they are in a very sensible and exquisite manner affected with their punishment, Isa. 33:14. Sinners in the state of their punishment are represented to dwell with everlasting burnings. But if they are only turned into nothing, where is the foundation for this representation? It is absurd to say that sinners will dwell with annihilation, for there is no dwelling in the case. It is also absurd to call annihilation a burning, which implies a state of existence, sensibility, and extreme pain: whereas in annihilation there is neither.

It is said that they shall be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone. How can this expression with any propriety be understood to mean a state of annihilation? Yea, they are expressly said to have no rest day nor night, but to be tormented with fire and brimstone forever and ever, Rev. 20:10. But annihilation is a state of rest, a state in which not the least torment can possibly be suffered. The rich man in hell lifted up his eyes being in torment, and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in

his bosom, and entered into a particular conversation with Abraham: all which proves that he was not annihilated.

The spirits of ungodly men before the resurrection are not in a state of annihilation, but in a state of misery. They are spirits in prison, as the apostle says of them that were drowned in the flood, 1 Pet. 3:19. — And this appears very plainly from the instance of the rich man before mentioned, if we consider him as representing the wicked in their separate state between death and the resurrection. But if the wicked even then are in a state of torment, much more will they be, when they shall come to suffer that which is the proper punishment of their sins.

Annihilation is not so great a calamity but that some men have undoubtedly chosen it, rather than a state of suffering even in this life. This was the case of Job, a good man. But if a good man in this world may suffer that which is worse than annihilation, doubtless the proper punishment of the wicked, in which God means to manifest his peculiar abhorrence of their wickedness, will be a calamity vastly greater still, and therefore cannot be annihilation. That must be a very mean contemptible testimony of God's wrath towards those who have rebelled against his crown and dignity — broken his laws, and despised both his vengeance and his grace — which is not so great a calamity as some of his true children have suffered in life.

The eternal punishment of the wicked is said to be the second death, as Rev. 20:14, and 21:8. It is doubtless called the second death in reference to the death of the body, and as the death of the body is ordinarily attended with great pain and distress, so the like, or something vastly greater, is implied in calling the eternal punishment of the wicked the second death. And there would be no propriety in calling it so, if it consisted merely in annihilation. And this second death wicked men will suffer, for it cannot be called the second death with respect to any other than men. It cannot be called so with respect to devils, as they die no temporal death, which is the first death. In Rev. 2:11, it is said, "He that overcometh, shall not be hurt of the second death;" implying that all who do not overcome their lusts, but live in sin, shall suffer the second death.

Again, wicked men will suffer the same kind of death with the devils; as in verse 41 of the context, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil

and his angels.” Now the punishment of the devil is not annihilation, but torment. He therefore trembles for fear of it. not for fear of being annihilated — he would be glad of that. Where he is afraid of is torment, as appears by Luke 8:28, where he cries out and beseeches Christ that he would not torment him before the time. And it is said, Rev. 20:10, “The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night, for ever and ever.”

It is strange how men will go directly against so plain and full revelations of Scripture, as to suppose notwithstanding all these things, that the eternal punishment threatened against the wicked signifies no more than annihilation.

III. As the future punishment of the wicked consists in sensible misery, so it shall not only continue for a very long time, but shall be absolutely without end.

Of those who have held that the torments of hell are not absolutely eternal, there have been two sorts. Some suppose that in the threatenings of everlasting punishment, the terms used do not necessarily import a proper eternity, but only a very long duration. Others suppose that if they do import a proper eternity, yet we cannot necessarily conclude thence, that God will fulfill his threatenings. — Therefore, I shall,

First, show that the threatenings of eternal punishment do very plainly and fully import a proper, absolute eternity, and not merely a long duration. — This appears,

1. Because when the Scripture speaks of the wicked being sentenced to their punishment at the time when all temporal things are come to an end, it then speaks of it as everlasting, as in the text, and elsewhere. It is true that the term forever is not always in Scripture used to signify eternity. Sometimes it means “as long as a man lives.” In this sense it is said that the Hebrew servant, who chose to abide with his master, should have his ear bored and should serve his master forever. Sometimes it means “during the continuance of the state and church of the Jews.” In this sense, several laws, which were peculiar to that church and were to continue in force no longer than that church should last, are called statutes forever. See Exo. 27:21, 28:43, etc. Sometimes it means as long as the world

stands. So in Ecc. 1:4, “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth for ever.”

And this last is the longest temporal duration that such a term is ever used to signify. For the duration of the world is the longest of things temporal, as its beginning was the earliest. Therefore, when the Scripture speaks of things as being before the foundation of the world, it means that they existed before the beginning of time. So those things which continue after the end of the world, are eternal things. When heaven and earth are shaken and removed, those things that remain will be what cannot be shaken, but will remain forever, Heb. 12:26-27.

But the punishment of the wicked will not only remain after the end of the world, but is called everlasting, as in the text, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment.” So in 2 Thes. 1:9-10, “Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints,” etc. — Now, what can be meant by a thing being everlasting, after all temporal things are come to an end, but that it is absolutely without end!

2. Such expressions are used to set forth the duration of the punishment of the wicked, as are never used in the scriptures of the New Testament to signify anything but a proper eternity. It is said, not only that the punishment shall be forever, but for ever and ever. Rev. 14:11, “The smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.” Rev. 20:10, “Shall be tormented day and night, for ever and ever.” Doubtless the New Testament has some expression to signify a proper eternity, of which it has so often occasion to speak. But it has no higher expression than this: if this do not signify an absolute eternity, there is none that does.

3. The Scripture uses the same way of speaking to set forth the eternity of punishment and the eternity of happiness, yea, the eternity of God himself. Mat. 25:46, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” The words everlasting and eternal, in the original, are the very same. Rev. 22:5, “And they (the saints) shall reign for ever and ever.” And the Scripture has no higher expression to signify the eternity of God himself, than that of his being for ever and ever, as Rev. 4:9, “To him who sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever;” and in the 10th verse, and in Rev. 5:14; 10:6, and 15:7.

Again, the Scripture expresses God's eternity by this: that it shall be forever, after the world is come to an end, Psa. 102:26-27, "They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end."

4. The Scripture says that wicked men shall not be delivered till they have paid the uttermost farthing of their debt, Mat. 5:26. The last mite, Luke 12:59, i.e. the utmost that is deserved, and all mercy is excluded by this expression. But we have shown that they deserve an infinite, an endless punishment.

5. The Scripture says absolutely that their punishment shall not have an end, Mark 9:44, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Now it will not do to say that the meaning is [that] their worm shall live a great while, or that it shall be a great while before their fire is quenched. If ever the time comes that their worm shall die, if ever there shall be a quenching of the fire at all, then it is not true that their worm dieth not and that the fire is not quenched. For if there be a dying of the worm and a quenching of the fire, let it be at what time it will, nearer or further off, it is equally contrary to such a negation — it dieth not, it is not quenched.

Second, there are others who allow that the expression of the threatenings do denote a proper eternity. But then, they say, it does not certainly follow that the punishment will really be eternal, because God may threaten, and yet not fulfill his threatenings. Though they allow that the threatenings are positive and peremptory, without any reserve, yet they say [that] God is not obliged to fulfill absolute positive threatenings, as he is absolute promises. Because in promises a right is conveyed that the creature to whom the promises are made will claim. But there is no danger of the creature's claiming any right by a threatening. Therefore I am now to show that what God has positively declared in this matter, does indeed make it certain that it shall be as he has declared. To this end, I shall mention two things:

1. It is evidently contrary to the divine truth, positively to declare anything to be real, whether past, present, or to come, which God at the same time knows is not so. Absolutely threatening that anything shall be, is the same as absolutely declaring that it is to be. For any to suppose that God absolutely declares that

anything will be, which be at the same time knows will not be, is blasphemy, if there be any such thing as blasphemy.

Indeed, it is very true that there is no obligation on God, arising from the claim of the creature, as there is in promises. They seem to reckon the wrong way, who suppose the necessity of the execution of the threatening to arise from a proper obligation on God to the creature to execute consequent on his threatening. For indeed the certainty of the execution arises the other way, viz. on the obligation there was on the omniscient God, in threatening, to conform his threatening to what he knew would be future in execution. Though, strictly speaking, God is not properly obliged to the creature to execute because he has threatened, yet he was obliged not absolutely to threaten, if at the same time he knew that he should not or would not fulfill, because this would not have been consistent with his truth. So that from the truth of God there is an inviolable connection between positive threatenings and execution. They who suppose that God positively declared that he would do contrary to what he knew would come to pass, do therein suppose, that he absolutely threatened contrary to what he knew to be truth. And how anyone can speak contrary to what he knows to be truth, in declaring, promising, or threatening, or any other way, consistently with inviolable truth, is inconceivable.

Threatenings are significations of something, and if they are made consistently with truth, they are true significations, or significations of truth, that which shall be. If absolute threatenings are significations of anything, they are significations of the futurity of the things threatened. But if the futurity of the things threatened be not true and real, then how can the threatening be a true signification? And if God, in them, speaks contrary to what he knows, and contrary to what he intends, how he can speak true is inconceivable.

Absolute threatenings are a kind of predictions. And though God is not properly obliged by any claim of ours to fulfill predictions, unless they are of the nature of promises, yet it certainly would be contrary to truth, to predict that such a thing would come to pass, which he knew at the same time would not come to pass. Threatenings are declarations of something future, and they must be declarations of future truth, if they are true declarations. Its being future alters not the case any more than if it were present. It is equally contrary to truth, to declare contrary

to what at the same time is known to be truth, whether it be of things past, present, or to come: for all are alike to God.

Besides, we have often declarations in Scripture of the future eternal punishment of the wicked, in the proper form of predictions, and not in the form of threatenings. So, in the text, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment.” So in those frequent assertions of eternal punishment in the Revelation, some of which I have already quoted. The Revelation is a prophecy, and is so called in the book itself. So are those declarations of eternal punishment. — The like declarations we have also in many other places of Scripture.

2. The doctrine of those who teach that it is not certain that God will fulfill those absolute threatenings, is blasphemous another way, and that is, as God, according to their supposition, was obliged to make use of a fallacy to govern the world. They own that it is needful that men should apprehend themselves liable to an eternal punishment, that they might thereby be restrained from sin, and that God has threatened such a punishment, for the very end that they might believe themselves exposed to it. But what an unworthy opinion does this convey of God and his government, of his infinite majesty, and wisdom, and all-sufficiency! — Beside, they suppose that though God has made use of such a fallacy, yet it is not such an one but that they have detected him in it. Though God intended men should believe it to be certain that sinners are liable to an eternal punishment, yet they suppose that they have been so cunning as to find out that it is not certain. And so that God had not laid his design so deep, but that such cunning men as they can discern the cheat and defeat the design, because they have found out that there is no necessary connection between the threatening of eternal punishment, and the execution of that threatening.

Considering these things, is it not greatly to be wondered at, that Archbishop Tillotson, who has made so great a figure among the new-fashioned divines, should advance such an opinion as this?

Before I conclude this head, it may be proper for me to answer an objection or two that may arise in the minds of some.

Objection 1. It may be here said [that] we have instances wherein God has not fulfilled his threatenings: as his threatening to Adam, and in him to mankind, that they should surely die, if they should eat the forbidden fruit. I answer, it is not true

that God did not fulfill that threatening. He fulfilled it and will fulfill it in every jot and tittle. When God said, “Thou shalt surely die,” if we respect spiritual death, it was fulfilled in Adam’s person in the day that he ate. For immediately his image, his holy spirit and original righteousness, which was the highest and best life of our first parents, were lost, and they were immediately in a doleful state of spiritual death.

If we respect temporal death, that was also fulfilled. He brought death upon himself and all his posterity, and he virtually suffered that death on that very day on which he ate. His body was brought into a corruptible, mortal, and dying condition, and so it continued till it was dissolved. If we look at all that death which was comprehended in the threatening, it was, properly speaking, fulfilled in Christ. When God said to Adam, “If thou eatest, thou shalt die,” he spoke not only to him, and of him personally, but the words respected mankind, Adam and his race, and doubtless were so understood by him. His offspring were to be looked upon as sinning in him, and so should die with him. The words do as justly allow of an imputation of death as of sin. They are as well consistent with dying in a surety, as with sinning in one. Therefore, the threatening is fulfilled in the death of Christ, the surety.

Objection 2. Another objection may arise from God’s threatening to Nineveh. He threatened, that in forty days Nineveh should be destroyed, which yet he did not fulfill. — I answer, that threatening could justly be looked upon no otherwise than as conditional. It was of the nature of a warning, and not of an absolute denunciation. Why was Jonah sent to the Ninevites, but to give them warning, that they might have opportunity to repent, reform, and avert the approaching destruction? God had no other design or end in sending the prophet to them, but that they might be warned and tried by him, as God warned the Israelites, Judah and Jerusalem, before their destruction. Therefore, the prophets, together with their prophecies of approaching destruction, joined earnest exhortations to repent and reform, that it might be averted.

No more could justly be understood to be certainly threatened, than that Nineveh should be destroyed in forty days, continuing as it was. For it was for their wickedness that that destruction was threatened, and so the Ninevites took it. Therefore, when the cause was removed, the effect ceased. It was contrary to

God's known manner, to threaten punishment and destruction for sin in this world absolutely, so that it should come upon the persons threatened unavoidably, let them repent and reform and do what they would; Jer. 18:7, 8, "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." So that all threatenings of this nature had a condition implied in them, according to the known and declared manner of God's dealing. And the Ninevites did not take it as an absolute sentence of denunciation: if they had, they would have despaired of any benefit by fasting and reformation.

But the threatenings of eternal wrath are positive and absolute. There is nothing in the Word of God from which we can gather any condition. The only opportunity of escaping is in this world. This is the only state of trial, wherein we have any offers of mercy, or place for repentance.

IV. I shall mention several good and important ends, which will be obtained by the eternal punishment of the wicked.

First, hereby God vindicates his injured majesty. Wherein sinners cast contempt upon it, and trample it in the dust, God vindicates and honors it and makes it appear, as it is indeed infinite, by showing that it is infinitely dreadful to condemn or offend it.

Second, God glorifies his justice. — The glory of God is the greatest good. It is that which is the chief end of the creation. It is of greater importance than anything else. But this one way wherein God will glorify himself, as in the eternal destruction of ungodly men, he will glorify his justice. Therein he will appear as a just governor of the world. The vindictive justice of God will appear strict, exact, awful, and terrible, and therefore glorious.

Third, God hereby indirectly glorifies his grace on the vessels of mercy. — The saints in heaven will behold the torments of the damned: "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." Isa. 66:24, "And they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh." And in Rev. 14:10 it is said, that they shall be tormented

in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. So they will be tormented in the presence also of the glorified saints.

Hereby the saints will be made the more sensible how great their salvation is. When they shall see how great the misery is from which God has saved them, and how great a difference he has made between their state and the state of others, who were by nature (and perhaps for a time by practice) no more sinful and ill-deserving than any, it will give them a greater sense of the wonderfulness of God's grace to them. Every time they look upon the damned, it will excite in them a lively and admiring sense of the grace of God, in making them so to differ. This the apostle informs us is one end of the damnation of ungodly men; Rom. 9:22-23, "What if God willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?" The view of the misery of the damned will double the ardor of the love and gratitude of the saints in heaven.

Fourth, the sight of hell torments will exalt the happiness of the saints forever. It will not only make them more sensible of the greatness and freeness of the grace of God in their happiness, but it will really make their happiness the greater, as it will make them more sensible of their own happiness. It will give them a more lively relish of it: it will make them prize it more. When they see others, who were of the same nature and born under the same circumstances, plunged in such misery, and they so distinguished, O it will make them sensible how happy they are. A sense of the opposite misery, in all cases, greatly increases the relish of any joy or pleasure.

The sight of the wonderful power, the great and dreadful majesty, and awful justice and holiness of God, manifested in the eternal punishment of ungodly men, will make them prize his favor and love vastly the more. And they will be so much the more happy in the enjoyment of it.

APPLICATION

I. From what has been said, we may learn the folly and madness of the greater part of mankind, in that for the sake of present momentary gratification, they run the venture of enduring all these eternal torments. They prefer a small pleasure, or a little wealth, or a little earthly honor and greatness, which can last but for a

moment, to an escape from this punishment. If it be true that the torments of hell are eternal, what will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? What is there in this world, which is not a trifle and lighter than vanity, in comparison with these eternal things?

How mad are men, who so often hear of these things and pretend to believe them; who can live but a little while (a few years); who do not even expect to live here longer than others of their species ordinarily do; and who yet are careless about what becomes of themselves in another world, where there is no change and no end! How mad are they, when they hear that if they go on in sin, they shall be eternally miserable — that they are not moved by it, but hear it with as much carelessness and coldness as if they were no way concerned in the matter — when they know not but that it may be their case, that they may be suffering these torments before a week is at an end!

How can men be so careless of such a matter as their own eternal and desperate destruction and torment! What a strange stupor and senselessness possesses the hearts of men! How common a thing is it to see men, who are told from Sabbath to Sabbath of eternal misery, and who are as mortal as other men, so careless about it that they seem not to be at all restrained by it from whatever their souls lust after! It is not half so much their care to escape eternal misery, as it is to get money and land, and to be considerable in the world, and to gratify their sense. Their thoughts are much more exercised about these things, and much more of their care and concern is about them. Eternal misery, though they lie every day exposed to it, is a thing neglected, it is but now and then thought of, and then with a great deal of stupidity, and not with concern enough to stir them up to do anything considerable in order to escape it. They are not sensible that it is worth their while to take any considerable pains in order to it. And if they do take pains for a little while, they soon leave off, and something else takes up their thoughts and concern.

Thus, you see it among young and old. Multitudes of youth lead a careless life, taking little care about their salvation. So you may see it among persons of middle age, and with many advanced in years, and when they certainly draw near to the grave. — Yet these same persons will seem to acknowledge that the greater part

of men go to hell and suffer eternal misery, and this through carelessness about it. However, they will do the same. How strange is it that men can enjoy themselves and be at rest, when they are thus hanging over eternal burnings: at the same time, having no lease of their lives and not knowing how soon the thread by which they hang will break. Nor indeed do they pretend to know. And if it breaks, they are gone: they are lost forever, and there is no remedy! Yet they trouble not themselves much about it, nor will they hearken to those who cry to them, and entreat them to take care for themselves, and labor to get out of that dangerous condition. They are not willing to take so much pains. They choose not to be diverted from amusing themselves with toys and vanities. Thus, well might the wise man say, Ecc. 9:3, “The heart of the sons of men is full of evil. Madness is in their heart while they live; and after that they go to the dead.” — How much wiser are those few, who make it their main business to lay a foundation for eternity, to secure their salvation!

II. I shall improve this subject in a use of exhortation to sinners, to take care to escape these eternal torments. If they be eternal, one would think that would be enough to awaken your concern, and excite your diligence. If the punishment be eternal, it is infinite, as we said before. And therefore, no other evil, no death, no temporary torment that ever you heard of, or that you can imagine, is anything in comparison with it, but is as much less and less considerable, not only as a grain of sand is less than the whole universe, but as it is less than the boundless space which encompasses the universe. — Therefore here,

First, be entreated to consider attentively how great and awful a thing eternity is. Although you cannot comprehend it the more by considering, yet you may be made more sensible that it is not a thing to be disregarded. — Do but consider what it is to suffer extreme torment forever and ever: to suffer it day and night from one year to another, from one age to another, and from one thousand ages to another (and so adding age to age, and thousands to thousands), in pain, in wailing and lamenting, groaning and shrieking, and gnashing your teeth — with your souls full of dreadful grief and amazement, [and] with your bodies and every member full of racking torture; without any possibility of getting ease; without any possibility of moving God to pity by your cries; without any possibility of hiding yourselves from him; without any possibility of diverting your thoughts

from your pain; without any possibility of obtaining any manner of mitigation, or help, or change for the better.

Second, do but consider how dreadful despair will be in such torment. How dismal will it be, when you are under these racking torments, to know assuredly that you never, never shall be delivered from them. To have no hope: when you shall wish that you might be turned into nothing, but shall have no hope of it; when you shall wish that you might be turned into a toad or a serpent, but shall have no hope of it; when you would rejoice if you might but have any relief; after you shall have endured these torments millions of ages, but shall have no hope of it. After you shall have worn out the age of the sun, moon, and stars, in your dolorous groans and lamentations, without rest day and night, or one minute's ease, yet you shall have no hope of ever being delivered. After you shall have worn a thousand more such ages, you shall have no hope, but shall know that you are not one whit nearer to the end of your torments. But that still there are the same groans, the same shrieks, the same doleful cries, incessantly to be made by you, and that the smoke of your torment shall still ascend up forever and ever. Your souls, which shall have been agitated with the wrath of God all this while, will still exist to bear more wrath. Your bodies, which shall have been burning all this while in these glowing flames, shall not have been consumed, but will remain to roast through eternity, which will not have been at all shortened by what shall have been past.

You may by considering make yourselves more sensible than you ordinarily are. But it is a little you can conceive of what it is to have no hope in such torments. How sinking would it be to you, to endure such pain as you have felt in this world, without any hopes, and to know that you never should be delivered from it, nor have one minute's rest! You can now scarcely conceive how doleful that would be. How much more to endure the vast weight of the wrath of God without hope! The more the damned in hell think of the eternity of their torments, the more amazing will it appear to them. And alas, they will not be able to keep it out of their minds! Their tortures will not divert them from it, but will fix their attention to it. O how dreadful will eternity appear to them after they shall have been thinking on it for ages together, and shall have so long an experience of their torments! The damned in hell will have two infinites perpetually to amaze them, and swallow them up: one is an infinite God, whose wrath they will bear, and in whom they will

behold their perfect and irreconcilable enemy. The other is the infinite duration of their torment.

If it were possible for the damned in hell to have a comprehensive knowledge of eternity, their sorrow and grief would be infinite in degree. The comprehensive view of so much sorrow, which they must endure, would cause infinite grief for the present. Though they will not have a comprehensive knowledge of it, yet they will doubtless have a vastly more lively and strong apprehension of it than we can have in this world. Their torments will give them an impression of it. — A man in his present state, without any enlargement of his capacity, would have a vastly more lively impression of eternity than he has, if he were only under some pretty sharp pain in some member of his body, and were at the same time assured that he must endure that pain forever. His pain would give him a greater sense of eternity than other men have. How much more will those excruciating torments, which the damned will suffer, have this effect!

Besides, their capacity will probably be enlarged, their understandings will be quicker and stronger in a future state, and God can give them as great a sense and as strong an impression of eternity, as he pleases, to increase their grief and torment. — O be entreated, ye that are in a Christless state and are going on in a way to hell, that are daily exposed to damnation, to consider these things. If you do not, it will surely be but a little while before you will experience them, and then you will know how dreadful it is to despair in hell. And it may be before this year, or this month, or this week, is at an end: before another Sabbath, or ever you shall have opportunity to hear another sermon.

Third, that you may effectually escape these dreadful and awful torments. Be entreated to flee and embrace him who came into the world for the very end of saving sinners from these torments, who has paid the whole debt due to the divine law, and exhausted eternal in temporal sufferings. What great encouragement is it to those of you who are sensible that you are exposed to eternal punishment, that there is a Savior provided, who is able and who freely offers to save you from that punishment, and that in a way which is perfectly consistent with the glory of God: yea, which is more to the glory of God than it would be if you should suffer the eternal punishment of hell. For if you should suffer that punishment you would never pay the whole of the debt. Those who

are sent to hell never will have paid the whole of the debt which they owe to God, nor indeed a part which bears any proportion to the whole. They never will have paid a part which bears so great a proportion to the whole, as one mite to ten thousand talents. Justice therefore never can be actually satisfied in your damnation. But it is actually satisfied in Christ. Therefore, he is accepted of the Father, and therefore all who believe are accepted and justified in him. Therefore, believe in him, come to him, commit your souls to him to be saved by him. In him you shall be safe from the eternal torments of hell. Nor is that all: but through him you shall inherit inconceivable blessedness and glory, which will be of equal duration with the torments of hell. For, as at the last day the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, so shall the righteous, or those who trust in Christ, go into life eternal.