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Volume XVII
Issue 419

On "Aion" and "Aionios"

by — Thomas Allin (1838–1909)

Let us consider the true meaning of the words *aion* and *aionios*.¹ These are the originals of the terms rendered by our translators "everlasting," "for ever and ever," and on these translations, so misleading, a vast portion of the popular dogma of endless torment is built up. I say, without hesitation, misleading and incorrect; for *aion* means "an age," a limited period, whether long or short, though often of indefinite length; and the adjective *aionios* means "of the age," "age-long," "aeonian," and never "everlasting" (of its own proper force) ...

A point of great importance is this, that it would have been impossible for the Jews, as it is impossible for us, to accept Christ, except by assigning a limited – nay, a very limited duration – to those Mosaic ordinances which were said in the Old Testament to be "for ever," to be "everlasting" (*aeonian*). Every line of the New Testament, nay, the very existence of Christianity is thus in fact a proof of the limited sense of *aionios* in Scripture ...

As a further illustration of the meaning of *aion* and *aionios*, let me point out that in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the *Septuagint*) – in common use among the Jews in Our Lord's time, from which He and the Apostles usually quoted, and whose authority, therefore, should be decisive on this point – these terms are repeatedly applied to things that have long ceased to exist. Thus the Aaronic

1. "The word by itself, whether adjective or substantive, never means endless." — Canon Farrar

"The conception of 'eternity,' in the Semitic languages, is that of a long duration and series of ages." — J.S. Blunt, *Dictionary of Theology*

"Tis notoriously known," says Bishop Rust, "that the Jews, whether writing in Hebrew or Greek, do by *olam* (the Hebrew word corresponding to *aion*), and *aion* mean any remarkable period and duration, whether it be of life, or dispensation, or polity... The word *aion* is never used in Scripture, or anywhere else, in the sense of endlessness ('eternity'), it always meant, both in Scripture and out, a period of time; else how could it have a plural – how could you talk of the *aeons* and *aeons* of *aeons* as the Scripture does? — C. Kingsley

So the secular games, celebrated every century were called "eternal" by the Greeks. — See Huet, *Orig.* ii. pg. 162

priesthood is said to be "everlasting" (Numbers 25:13); the land of Canaan is given as an "everlasting" possession, and "for ever" (Genesis 17:8; 13:15). In Deuteronomy 23:3, "for ever" is distinctly made an equivalent to "even to the tenth generation." In Lamentations 5:19, "for ever and ever" is the equivalent of from "generation to generation." The inhabitants of Palestine are to be bondsmen "for ever" (Leviticus 25:46). In Numbers 18:19, the heave offerings of the holy things are a covenant "for ever." Caleb obtains his inheritance "for ever" (Joshua 14:9). And David's seed is to endure "for ever," his throne "for ever," his house "for ever" – nay, the passover is to endure "for ever," and in Isaiah 32:14, the forts and towers shall be "dens for ever, until the spirit be poured upon us." So in Jude 7, Sodom and Gomorrah are said to be suffering the vengeance of "eternal" (*aeonian*) fire, *i.e.*, their temporal overthrow by fire, for they have a definite promise of final restoration (Ezekiel 16:55).

Christ's kingdom is to last "for ever," yet we are distinctly told that this very kingdom is to end (I Corinthians 15:24). Indeed, quotation might be added to quotation, both from the Bible and from early² authors, to prove this limited meaning of *aion* and its derivatives; but enough has probably been said to prove that it is wholly impossible, and indeed absurd, to contend that any idea of endless duration is necessarily or commonly implied by either *aion* or *aionios*.

Further, if this translation of *aionios* as "eternal," in the sense of endless, be correct, *aion* must mean eternity, *i.e.*, endless duration. Yet so to render it would reduce Scrip-

2. Thus Josephus calls *aeonian*, the temple of Herod, which was actually destroyed when he wrote. Philo never uses *aionios* of endless duration.

(see *Aion*, page 3754)

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Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
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Canada:

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rick@godisgod.ca

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Love Never Fails

Three Views of God's Victory

by — James Strahan

God is love, and love never fails. Never! Yet confusion abounds in our different predictions about how love's victory will be achieved and what the end product will look like. Boiled down, there are three pictures offered of what an ultimate win for love will look like, our Father's final victory. The question is, which one is right?

THE FIRST VIEW

In this image of God's victory, some see many celebrating in heaven while others suffer in hell-fire and brimstone, forever tormented day and night with no possibility of escape.

Despite the availability of an endless amount of time to consider the terrible mistakes made during their finite time on earth, there's no possibility of parole for the once wicked, no possibility for a change of heart, and even if there was, the time for extending mercy and forgiveness has long since passed.

Even though all wrongs have been made right in heaven, and even though all that was lost in a previous life has been restored, and even though restitution has been made beyond all expectations and beyond our wildest imagination with the redeemed enjoying all of it for billions upon billions of years, in spite of all of this, the possibility of a change of heart and reconciliation for God's wayward sons and daughters is gone. God tried to reach them during the few years they had on earth. He really, really tried hard, and now hell is a permanent reminder of that colossal failure.

I have personally witnessed a best-selling author and one of America's favorite pastors justify this picture of victory when he said that God was a gentleman, and that He would not force His will on anyone, but rather He was just honoring their request to choose hell over heaven.

Regarding free will, how ironic it is for men to say that He won't violate man's free will; but these same men have no problem believing that one day God will force all men to bow and confess to Christ, and keep them in a place they'd rather not be for all eternity.

Furthermore, retired philosophy professor Thomas Talbott demonstrated the lack of logic in this pastor's assertion when he compared it to a child sticking his hand in an open flame. Children do some stupid things in spite of our warnings, and sometimes, they get burned; but if they were to continue to stick their hand in the fire every time they saw an open flame, wouldn't that qualify as insanity? Wouldn't we seek professional help for such a child? Certainly, we would not condemn them. Is writing off your children as people who will never learn a picture of a parent's love that endures all things and never fails?

THE SECOND VIEW

In this image of God's victory some see many celebrating in heaven while others who, after being raised from the dead and judged for their bad behavior, are then annihilated – never to be heard from again.

Even though God had at His disposal an endless amount of tools and time for training, and even though all wrongs have been made right in heaven, and even though all that was lost in a previous life has been restored, and even though restitution has been made beyond all expectations and beyond our wildest imagination with the redeemed enjoying all of it for billions upon billions of years, in spite of all of this, the possibility of a change of heart and reconciliation for the wayward sons and daughters is gone.

You see, God tried, but He just could not reach them. And rather than erect a permanent monument of His failure as in the first picture, He just decided ►

✍ In the time of the end the last great monarch of Christendom will accept from Satan the scepter that our Lord refused. – A.E. Knoch
to annihilate them: out of sight – out of mind.

I understand that a recent Pope was against the death penalty because he thought that with a little more time, the guilty just might repent. Yet in this second picture, God decided against allowing any more time for repentance.

To the family and friends in heaven of those exterminated, how do we find them reacting to the idea of never seeing their loved ones again? I heard another pastor of a mega church explain how people in heaven will be able to overcome the sadness of lost loved ones annihilated or suffering throughout eternity. The title of his message was displayed in flashing bright lights outside the church. The sign read “Hell Yes”! “Heaven will be like eating a nice big juicy steak,” the pastor explained. “While you enjoy it, you are not thinking about the starving people all over the world. That’s what heaven will be like.” I noticed a quiet hush in the building. To say that my family will not be devastated if my brother-in-law doesn’t make it to Heaven, though unintended, is a cold and offensive presumption.

THE THIRD VIEW

That brings us to the third picture of God’s ultimate victory: everyone celebrating in heaven with some arriving sooner than others, but all eventually get-

ting there after having been judged for their deeds and forgiven of their sins, recognizing their own human frailty and the need for a change of heart, and after having acknowledged what Jesus Christ provided for them by His death on the cross.

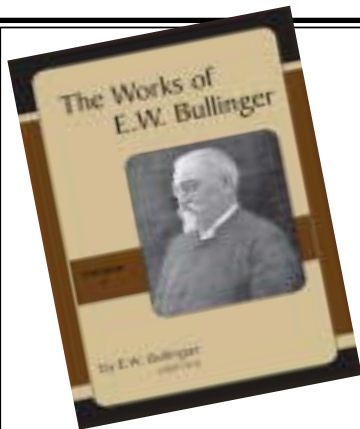
It took a little more time for some, and maybe a lot more time for the really rebellious, but eventually they finally came in because love endures all things and never fails. A brilliant Creator foreordained the end.

In this picture, Christ has become All in all, not All in some. Every tear has been wiped away off all faces, not just some. Every family and nation has been blessed, not just a few. This is because Jesus became the Savior of the world, not just some. He took away the sins of the world, not just some, by drawing (or dragging) all men to Him, not just some. Now there is no more death because of His victory over the grave.

CHURCH HISTORY

A few brief words on Church history will help us understand how each point of view came to us.

About the turn of the fifth century, Jerome wrote the *Latin Vulgate* to bring unity to the Latin Church since there were so many different Latin dialects and



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translations that were confusing. His translation became the Bible for 1500 years.

It is well known that Jerome had some difficulty translating into Latin the Greek word *aion* in its noun and adjective forms. However, he was clear in his belief that the words meant age and age-lasting.

Another very influential man at the time, Augustine, argued with Jerome that the words meant eternity and everlasting, even though he knew nothing about the Greek language and actually stated that he hated it.

Jerome was a follower of many of the early Church fathers who did believe in the reconciliation of all things – men like St. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose of Milan and Basil of Caesarea.

These men wrote, spoke and taught the Greek language. They believed that *aion* meant age, and that punishment was remedial and restorative in nature. Incidentally, I've seen ten other Greek words that do mean unending, but none of them are ever used in connection with punishment.

Later the Latin Church dominated Europe, and Augustine's view of eternity, as in the first picture above, was adopted by most. Augustine believed that the majority of mankind was "one damned batch of perdition." He believed that:

1. God was sovereign and His will would be done.
2. The majority of mankind was predestined for eternal torture.

3. Since most would miss Heaven, God did not want all to be saved.

Augustine's philosophy became the forerunner of Calvinism. Later, Jakobus Arminius came along and tried to correct this rather harsh view of our Heavenly Father with His belief that:

1. God does want all men to be saved.
2. Most of mankind will still miss heaven as in Augustine's view.
3. Therefore God's will will not be done.

Those who hold this view believe that all things said about our Heavenly Father in the Lord's Prayer are true, except one. Is He our Father? Is He in Heaven? Is His name Holy? Will His Kingdom come? Will He give us our daily bread? Will He forgive us? Will He lead us not into temptation? Will He deliver us from the evil one? Is the Kingdom His? Is the power His? Is the glory His?

Yet somehow, in the middle of all of these affirmations, His will is not done on earth as it is in Heaven. That's a very sad statement, no matter your view about what God's ultimate victory will look like.

Another sad statement in history, in my opinion, came from King James after ordering the translation of Scripture into English, when he told the boys that whatever they did, they should not upset the orthodoxy of the Church. So, Augustine's paradigm and his biases became embedded in the *King James Version*. Most sadly, the majority of Christians are unaware of the controversy.

(see *LOVE*, next page)

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AION (continued from front page)

ture to an absurdity. In the first place, you would have over and over again to talk of the “eternities.” We can comprehend what “eternity” is, but what are the “eternities?” You cannot have more than one eternity.

Let me state the dilemma clearly. *Aion* either means endless duration as its necessary, or at least its ordinary significance, or it does not. If it does, the following difficulties at once arise:

1. How, if it mean an endless period, can *aion* have a plural?
2. How came such phrases to be used as those repeatedly occurring in Scripture, where *aion* is added to *aion*, if *aion* is of itself infinite?
3. How come such phrases as for the “*aion*” or *aions* and **beyond?** – *ton aiona kai ep aiona kai eti: eis tous aionas kai eti.* (See *Septuagint*: Exodus 15:18; Daniel 12:3; Micah 4:5.)
4. How is it that we repeatedly read of the **end** of the *aion*? (Matthew 13:39-40, 49; 24:3; 28:20; I Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 9:26).
5. Finally, if *aion* be infinite, why is it applied over and over to what is strictly finite (e.g. Mark 4:19; Acts 3:21; Romans 12:2; I Corinthians 1:20; 2:6; 3:18; 10:11; etc.)? Yet if an *aion* be not definite, what right have we to render the adjective *aionios* (which depends for its meaning on *aion*) by the terms “*eternal*” (when used as the equivalent of “endless”) and “*everlasting*?”

Indeed our translators have really done further hurt to those who can only read their English Bible. They have wholly obscured a very important doctrine, that of “*the ages*.” This, when fully understood, throws a flood of light on the plan of redemption, and the method of the divine working.

In these repeated instances there must be some definite purpose in the use of these peculiar terms; and we must deeply regret the unfairness and inconsistency which in the case of *aion* mars and renders unfair our versions. Thus it would be interesting to ask on what principle our revisers have in one brief epistle employed **five** different words (or phrases) to translate this one word, *aion* (e.g. Ephesians 1:21; 2:2, 7; 3:11, 21), e.g. “*world*,” “*course*,” “*age*,” “*eternal*,” “*for ever*.” Such are the devious ways of our teachers, and our translators. ■

Christ Triumphant, 1890
(see ad this page)

LOVE (continued from previous page)

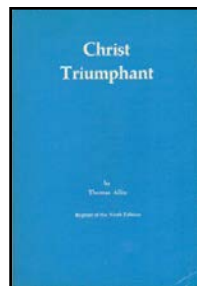
Those early church fathers who saw the third picture of love’s victory believed that:

1. God is sovereign and His will would be done.
2. God wants all men to be saved.
3. Therefore, given enough time, our Father pursues even that last sheep, and ends up with 100% of the flock, because love never fails.

So there you have the three points of view and a little history behind them. Of course, by now you know my view. Simply put, I have no doubt that God desires to save all men. Furthermore, I believe that He has the ability to pull it off.

I’ll close with some encouragement from Jesus that brings us all together again. In Luke 12:57, Jesus commanded us to judge for ourselves what is right. When He walked among us, He was always asking His followers, “What do you think?” and “Who do you say I am?”

In summary, I believe He was challenging us to read, study, ask and pray. May God bless us all as we do these things in our pursuit of Him. ■



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by — Thomas Allin (1838–1909)

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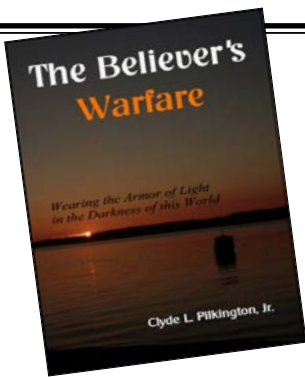


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