

Bible Student's Notebook The Herald of His Grace

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Volume XIX Issue 459

The Salvation of the Unbeliever

Part 2 of 2

by — A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)

et no one suppose that we plead for the repeal of God's Word regarding the doom of the unbeliever: far from it. Yet we do plead for the removal of those harsh human perversions of His Word which seek to make Him a man like ourselves – hateful and hating one another, vindictive and vicious in our views of the so-called "penalties" of sin. We plead for a revision of our vocabulary on this important theme. Many of our words and expressions are not only unscriptural, but positively anti-scriptural.

Let those who constantly refer to the lake of fire as a place of *punishment*, *chastening*, *destruction*, *apollumi*, *extermination olethros*, and the like, reflect on the fact that these terms are not used specifically of the burning lake. With the possible exception of the destruction of the wild beast (Revelation 17:8, 11) all refer to previous judgments, and none of them preclude the resurrection of those to whom they are applied. In other words, the strongest terms to be found in the Scriptures are *avoided* when speaking of this final infliction. The true scriptural phrase to use when we desire to describe its action is "the second death."

The terms *destroy* and *destruction* are so often used of irrecoverable ruin that a few examples will be given to show how far this is from the truth. The rendering "lost" is always the translation of the word for destroy. It would be the utmost folly for the Son of Mankind to seek, much less to save those who are annihilated. The lost sheep and the lost coin and the lost prodigal all had been destroyed, yet all were found and saved. Were the whole world lost, or destroyed in the lake of fire, that would be no hindrance to salvation. Rather, it would be the very sphere in which salvation alone can operate. Christ cannot save anyone unless first he is destroyed, or lost.

Such is the salvation of the unbeliever. It is not only in

absolute accord with every passage in the Word of God, but in utmost harmony with the God Who is revealed through that Word. How can anyone who truly loves Him rest satisfied with less than this, the only true, the only scriptural solution? How infinitely it lifts Him above the defeated, vindictive deity of Christendom! How grandly it accords with all of those attributes which theology gives

Him with its left hand and filches from Him with its right! Is He love? Then how can He bear the very thought of eternal torment for a single one of His creatures, much less for myriads of millions? Is He omnipotent? Then why is He unable to rescue them? The Buddha of Christendom is great in name, but small in deed. He makes great claims but does not live up to his reputation.

THE SECOND DEATH IS THE PENALTY FOR SIN

Let those who are fond of reasoning about the destiny of the universe adopt their own premises and follow them out logically, and the inevitable conclusion will be a universal reconciliation. Try it and see. All will acknowledge these premises:

God is love ... therefore? God is omnipotent ... therefore?

God is not love if He will not do all that He can for His creatures, neither is He omnipotent if He is unable to save them. Hence, the God of theology is magnificent, but the god of eschatology is a myth.

(see Unbeliever, page 4083)

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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
- 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:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

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Unbeliever (continued from front page)

Both revelation and reason are arrayed against the false delusion of unending torment for the unbeliever. It degrades the sacrifice of Christ to a mere attempt to remedy an evil which it cannot cure. O, my brethren, why do you limit His love, why do you paralyze His power? Is the Christ Who saved *you* capable of completing His work by saving all like you? Or, if He *can*, why *will* He not? Would *you*, if you could?

Confess that this terrible doctrine cannot but lead you to doubt His perfections. It brings you up to a blank wall, to a pit of dense darkness; but the blessed truth opens up a glorious vista flooded with the love light of God.

This leaves the way open to consider the moral effect of this doctrine as it relates to our concept of God's love. The sinner is dead and, apart from the power of God in resurrection, quite as good as annihilated. What possible benefit can accrue to the sinner to expend unmeasured power in his resurrection and unstinted force in his judgment, only to return him to oblivion? From the sinner's side it would be unutterably cruel and vindictive.

Yet, we are told, God's justice demands it. There is an element of truth in this: but if God's justice must be displayed at the expense of His love, the extinction of the unbeliever in the lake of fire, far from forever removing an eyesore from the universe, places a blot on His character which eternity itself can never erase. If we do not doubt His willingness to save them, then we must acknowledge His inability. If we cannot question His power, then we must limit His love, and then we endanger the very foundation on which all eternal bliss must be established.

Once more we affirm, without the slightest fear of contradiction, that the judgment of the unbeliever is confined to the period between the resurrection and the second death. If this is the end of the unbeliever, if the mighty miracle of resurrection and the awful judgment session have no other object than the infliction of the pains and penalties each deserves, we despair, not for the unbeliever, for his fate is not the paramount consideration, but for the character of God, Who uses power unstinted to satisfy the stern demands of justice, yet outrages every instinct of His love. No amount of sophistry will ever annihilate the stubborn fact that they are His creatures, and their final fate is just as much His work as was their creation at the first. As creatures, they had no more command of their destiny than they had of their birth or their environment. All was of God - He held the reins - and let us remember that salvation depends not on character or attainments such as might be within the reach of mortals, but upon

the knowledge of the One Whose very name will be unknown to the great majority who stand before Him in that awful day. They are not saved *because God has not saved them*, and for no other reason whatever. If their existence has been futile and a blot on the universe, the final disgrace falls on God, Who was the only One Who could have averted the disaster.

THE UNBELIEVER SHALL NOT BE SEEING LIFE

The resurrection and judgment of unbelievers leaves no reasonable alternative but their ultimate salvation. Without such an outcome, so great and stupendous an exhibition of hatred and futile rage would throw a pall of settled gloom across God's glory for all eternity. Only the wickedest of men are unsatisfied when their enemies are dead, and would bring them back from the grave to endure still further torment.

Yet we do not need to rest on reason. At best, it is usually the refuge of unbelief. God has spoken, and real reason rests on His revelation. He is the Savior of all mankind, especially of those who believe. God give us grace to glory in such a God!

In that marvelous revelation concerning the vivification of all found in I Corinthians 15, there is a notable omission which has a vital bearing on the resurrection of judgment which we are considering. The words, "And if anyone was not found written in the scroll of life," has led a few kind hearts into the supposition that some, perhaps many, are not cast into the lake of fire, but live on with the saints during the eon of the eons, which follows. This would transform this resurrection into a partial vivification.

Yet the great outline of vivification sketched by the apostle includes only three classes at three distinct epochs. After the Firstfruit, Christ, all who are His are made alive at His presence. The last class is vivified at the consummation. There is no class in between. The resurrection of judgment, before the great white throne, is ignored altogether. No one will be *vivified*, in the full sense of that word, when the unbelievers are raised from the dead. All die again. All return into the domains of death during the eons.

The death which comes at the close of this life is the effect of natural law, not of a divine decision. Sin, in Scripture, is represented as a great Slaveholder. He does not pay *wages*, as our version puts it (Romans 6:23). Who ever heard of a *slave* getting *wages*? He deals out rations. Sin's ration is death. The sting of death is sin. Sin, fully consummated, is bringing forth death (James 1:15). Only in the case of ▶

criminals is death the result of a judicial decree, yet, even then, it is at the hand of man and not of God.

The fact that the believer and the unbeliever share alike in the first death ought to be sufficient proof that it is not, in any sense, a judicial infliction on God's part. The saint is assured of immunity from all judgment, yet he does not escape the first death. Death as the penalty of sin cannot be inflicted until after judgment has held its session. If God's decree calls for such a penalty for sin, this is not satisfied with the death common to all in Adam. Hence, judgment is followed by the second death.

In the opening chapters of Romans Paul lays the foundation on which God's just judgment is based. He closes his indictment of mankind with these words: "... God's just statute, that such as are committing them are deserving of death ..." As the first death cannot be the effect of any judicial procedure on God's part, it is evident that the death penalty awaits all who come into the judgment. Whatever may be the variety and degree of the tribulation and anguish meted out to each, one common end awaits them all: the second death.

This divine decree is in fullest harmony with the great truth that eonian life is for only the believer. Only those chosen by His sovereign grace have the privilege of living with Christ for the eons of the eons and of being associated With Him in His work of reconciling the universe to God. A result of the unbeliever's judgment consists in exclusion from these blessings and dignities.

He who is believing into the Son has eonian life, yet he who is stubborn as to the Son shall not be seeing life, but the indignation of God is remaining on him.

These words are awful enough in their bearing on the un-

believer without changing the inspired original, as most or all of our versions do, to the indefinite, thus denying the great truth that all shall be made alive at the consummation. "Shall not see life" denotes a fact and is timeless. "Shall not be seeing life" is definite, and confines the sense to the future eons which are in question. The unbeliever can have no share in the life of the eons.

THE UNBELIEVER IS VIVIFIED IN CHRIST, THE SAVIOR

God is light and God is love. The unbeliever learns the first at the great white throne. He realizes the second at the consummation. Just as, in the epistle to the Romans, we are first acquainted with the just God Who justifies us, and later with God the reconciler, Who invites us into His heart, so the salvation of the unbeliever divides itself into the judgment session, where he is judged in fact as we are by faith, and the ultimate vivification, when death is abolished, and God becomes All in all.

"Yet," some will ask, "if they were condemned to death, how can they be raised again? What right have they to the grace and life that will be their portion?" We answer, "None." They will have no more claim on the ecstatic bliss of that unending day than we, or you, or any believer! What right have we? None at all; but in Christ we have a perfect title to every favor. So it will be with the unbeliever. It is not written that, "As in Adam all are dying, so all shall be made alive," but "so, in Christ, all shall be made alive." Adam's death involves all, irrespective of their deserts. Christ's life extends to all, apart from their personal merits.

Here is where the unbeliever learns to love God. The judgment has exposed his own unworthiness. The grace of vivification will illumine his heart with the love of God in Christ. Then shall be fulfilled God's universal goal:



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... to Me will bow every knee, and every tongue will be acclaiming God (Romans 14:11).

This is the method He will use to bend the stubborn knees. He will not use physical force but moral suasion. Neither will He wring out a confession of sin from every tongue. The word here used means more than that. When our Lord said, "I thank Thee, O Father" (Matthew11:25; Luke 10:21) He used this term. It includes a complete acknowledgment and acquiescence in the divine will.

This is God's way with the unbeliever. We are fond of recalling God's dealings with us to bring us to Himself. Some have been driven to Him through the loss of earthly possessions; others found Him in the midst of trials; His written Word alone has led myriads to see themselves and the loveliness of His Christ – but no believer today has passed through any experience which even approaches the stupendous realities which await the unbeliever. With the very earth swept from beneath his feet, with his sins staring at him and open to every eye, with the awful Presence on the great white throne - all superimposed on a personal experience of the greatest of all miracles - what more could possibly be done to turn him back to God? Who ever doubts that Lazarus or the widow of Nain's son was saved? Others believed who merely heard and saw but had none of the personal knowledge that they possessed. So, who can doubt that such an awful scene and such a stupendous experience will turn the hearts of all unbelievers toward the God of their salvation?

Some have sneeringly asked whether punishment will reform the sinner, and have pointed out the hardening effects of judgment; but this rests on the vulgar and unscriptural notion of punishment apart from resurrection. Others make judgment the end and an end in itself, little heeding the effect of this on God. Yet this judgment scene is not the end nor an end. When we see a sinner, convicted of sin, burdened with fear, we rejoice to behold the work of God, knowing that it is but the beginning of His operations. So the great white throne judgment is but the preliminary to God's greater work at the consummation.

God's Love and Power

The crowning and conclusive exhibition of God's power and love toward the unbeliever awaits the consummation. The eons are past. All sin is banished. Evil is no more. The Son of God has nearly completed His mediatorial work. All of the living are in perfect accord with God. Nothing remains but the conquest of death and the reconciliation of its denizens. It is the only enemy left in all of God's universe. Then, and not until then, will the vast concourse of mankind emerge from the domain of death, never to enter it again. Then that voice for which we wait, that will call His own from the graves, and that once before had called them back to life, will speak with power, and death will be despoiled, the last enemy laid low. Then shall all awake to live in the light and love of Him Who will have become in truth the Savior of all mankind.







I read your *Daily Email Goodies* every day. My husband and I love it. I agree with you. If only churches would preach Pauline doctrine we probably wouldn't be in this mess. Keep up the good work. Praying for your needs. -NY

Thank you for sending *Bible Student's Notebook*. I have read them with much pleasure from issue number 225 and on. I have learned a lot since then about the true gospel of salvation for all. Thank you so much and keep up the good work, God bless you. – *Netherlands*

Don't know what I would do without you. -GA

Your 8 minute video *Christ's Successful Work* is awesome. Please send me more short ones like this. Most of my friends have very short attention spans and won't watch anything longer. – **MO**

Keep up the good work. -VA

You are a link to my spiritual transformation. I thank God for you. – *IL*

I am listening to your radio station now for the first time, I like it. -NM

I just finished reading <u>Due Benevolence</u>. WOW! I loved the book and have to thank you for your brilliant and persistent scholarship. It continues to amaze me that biblical scholars who specialize in ancient languages seem to be unable or unwilling to produce accurate translations, especially when you (or even I) can simply consult a Greek or Hebrew concordance and find correct meanings. Most of the scriptural translations for the most part are the result of bad scholarship or deliberate deception. I suspect the latter.

I wish I had had your book many years ago. I was again (as with eternal punishment) bludgeoned by the "church" with lies about human sexuality. I suppose most of us who grew up in fundamentalist churches have suffered many years of shame, guilt and fear. You have helped me greatly and I am thankful. – IL

I thank God for your ministry! The *Daily Email* <u>Goodies</u> always come just at the right time. – GA

Thank you for your hard work. The efforts of you, your family and friends are bearing fruit. -PA



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The First Idiot in Heaven

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by — Martin Zender

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If you want to stay on Earth, wrestle with law. If you want to go to heaven, give up on yourself and embrace the gospel for sinners and idiots.

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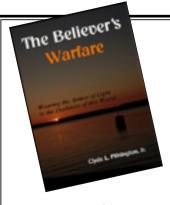
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The Believer's Warfare

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

The believer is in the middle of an ancient spiritual warfare that is as old as mankind. The battle itself, although intense, is not complicated. It is not a process of spiritual hoop-jumping. Indeed it is simple. *The Believer's Warfare* surveys a few key passages of Scripture to reveal God's sure plan of victory in the life of His saints.

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