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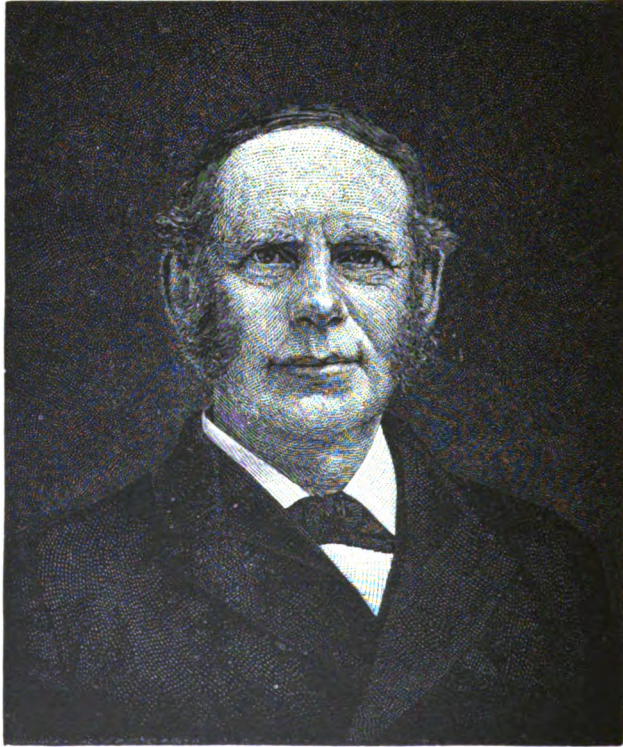
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T. de Witt Talmage

CHAPTER XLVII.

I DECLINE TO THINK THAT THE MAJORITY OF THE HUMAN RACE WILL BE FINALLY DISCOMFITED.

Not Human Assertions or Opinions, but the Bible, Authoritatively Settles the Question here Discussed.—The Absolute Truthfulness of that Source is the Ground for Believing in the Doctrine of Future Punishment.—It is such a Question of Imminent Personal Safety as Forbids all Lightsome Criticism, or Caviling, or Superficial Polemic Treatment.—The Representations used by Christ himself, and by his Apostles, concerning Future Retribution are Not Mere Similes or Metaphors, but Statements of the Actual Horrors of Hell.—God's Indignation and Wrath are as Emphatically Taught in the Scriptures as his Love and Mercy.—Twenty-eight Times is his Love there Spoken of, Sixty-one Times are his Anger or Wrath Declared, and in Fifty-six Instances is the Reality of a Hell Depicted.—If Any One Makes that his Abode, he is a Suicide of his Own Immortal Soul.—Every Reasonable Inducement is Set before Man, Urging him Heavenward.—Soon the Road of Sin and Death will become Utterly Forsaken, void of any Traveler.—In Future Centuries, it will be Matter of Amazement that any Man could Turn his Back on God and Happiness.

By REV. T. DE WITT TALMAGE, D.D. LL.D., Pastor of the Brooklyn, N. Y., Tabernacle, Presbyterian.

THE Bible is the most forceful and pungent of books. While it has the sweetness of a mother's hush for human trouble, it has all the keenness of a cimeter, and the crushing power of a lightning-bolt. It portrays with more than a painter's power, at one stroke picturing a heavenly throne and a judgment conflagration. The strings of this great harp are fingered by all the splendors of the future, now sounding with the crackle of consuming worlds, now thrilling with the joy of the everlasting emancipated. It tells how one forbidden tree in the Garden blasted the earth with sickness and death; and how another tree, though leafless and bare, yet, planted on Calvary, shall yield a fruit which shall more than antidote the poison of the other. It tells how the red-ripe clusters of God's

wrath were brought to the wine-press, and Jesus trod them out; and how, at last, all the golden chalices of heaven shall glow with the wine of that awful vintage. It dazzles the eye with an Eze-kiel's vision of wheel, and wing, and fire, and whirlwind; and stoops down so low that it can put its lips to the ear of a dying child, and say, "Come up higher."

Much of this book I am able to understand. More of it is beyond my capacity. But it gives me no difficulty. I treat it as I treat the Atlantic ocean in summer time. I wade in until I find I am getting beyond my depth, and then I wade out. I wade in until the wave comes to my heart, but I do not wade in until it is over my head. For instance, there are many things on the subject of future punishment that I cannot understand or explain. Having made up my mind that the Bible is the only guide, I take that. There is to me no half-way house between old-fashioned Christianity and agnosticism. Agnosticism is thoroughly consistent with itself. It rejects the Bible, and then says we know nothing about the future. It is right in saying so, for having rejected the Bible we can know nothing of the next world. But I am one of the deluded creatures who believes the whole Bible, either as doctrine or history. Bancroft does not approve of the Indian massacres which he describes, nor does Carlyle, in his *Frederick the Great*, approve of all he mentions, nor do God and the prophets and apostles approve of much that the Bible records. So I take the Bible as true either for doctrine or history.

It makes but very little difference what De Witt Talmage thinks about this subject of future punishment, for it is only a little while ago he began to breathe, and in a little while he will stop breathing. It makes but little difference what Dean Stanley or Mr. Frothingham thinks about this, for they have never been into the eternal world, and can give no personal experience. The Roman Catholic Church, in all its synods and through all its popedoms, has declared its belief in a place of future retribution, but that does not necessarily settle it for me. The Methodist, Baptist, Episcopa-

lian, Presbyterian churches have adopted this theory in their creeds, but that does not authoritatively settle it for me.

I appeal, not to human authority or human opinion, but to that one Being who only can tell me whether there is a hell. That Being is God. I reject every opinion except that on which is written, "Thus saith the Lord." I put one "Thus saith the Lord" against all the sermons, all the disquisitions, all the books, of all the ages. "Thus saith the Lord."

You see I start on the assumption that the Bible is true. If you deny it is true, I will not argue that matter here. As common-sense readers, you know that in making any argument on any secular or religious subject, there must be some common data, some common ground, where we shall start together. It would be as silly for me to try to prove to you who reject the truth of the Bible, that there is a place of future punishment, as it would be for me to discuss fraud and crime and their penalties with a man who denies Blackstone and the statutes of the state of New York. Our common sense tells us that there must be some common ground where we can start.

Now, in passing, I have to ask those who reject the Bible some questions. "Is there a God?" "Yes," you say. "Is he good?" "Yes," you say. Now, I ask you, is it not reasonable that a good God should give us a revelation of some kind? Is it not reasonable to suppose that such a Being, starting our race in this world, would give them some guide, some directory, some written help? "Of course," you say, "that's so." Well, then, which is it? The Vedas, the Talmud, the writings of Confucius, the Koran of the Mohammedans, or the Bible? Which one of these is God's revelation to man?

If you will show me a book which seems to be a more reasonable and a better revelation from God than the Bible, I am willing to accept it. I like anything new and unique. By the constitution of my nature I prefer the new to the old. If you can hand me a book that seems to be a better revelation from God than the Bible,

I will take it and I will preach from it. Is there a man who denies everything? It is easy to deny.

You tell me that the Franco-German war is over. I may deny there has ever been such a war. Moreover, I may deny, for the sake of argument a moment, that there are any such places as France and Germany.

“But,” say you, “you will admit that there are such places as Moscow and Constantinople?” No; I never saw them. “But,” you say, “you must have seen the submarine telegrams at different times coming from there?” Yes, but those telegrams were not sworn to, and I do not know but that all those newspapers and all those telegraphers may have made a conspiracy to deceive me. In other words, I may deny everything.

“Well,” you say, “that is foolish.” I admit it; but you are doing in regard to the Bible just what I am now doing in regard to geography. You deny the geography of the eternal world, and I for the minute deny the geography of Europe.

Good-bye, my brother. I have no time to talk to you who reject the Bible. Some other time I will see you. I must turn now to those who believe the Bible to be true. Eternal Spirit of Almighty God, fall upon us now, while with fingers of dust we turn the sacred leaves, and with lips of ashes recite the most stupendous truths that ever shook the human soul.

Now, if we are honest men, we will come to this subject as we would in the midst of a great freshet, if at midnight we were on the Erie express train and were to say to the conductor, “Conductor, do you think any of the bridges are down to-night?”—with something of the feeling I had after our last lifeboat had been crushed to pieces in the midst of the ocean cyclone, when I said to the officer, “Officer, do you think we will ever get to New York?” He shook his head, as much as to say, “Don’t ask me.”

I have no sympathy with the flippant discussion of this truth, nor with that manner on the part of a preacher which seems to say, “You impenitent people will be lost, and you deserve it!” I feel

that I am a sinner, and because of the million transgressions of my heart and life I must perish, unless some one can show me a way out from under the condemnation. The pulpit from which I ordinarily preach may be two or three feet higher than the pew in which my hearers sit; but I realize that I am not raised the thousandth part of an inch above the level on which we must all stand in judgment before God.

I do not know how people can joke about this subject, and yet it is the subject of more puns, more caricatures, more jokes, in stores and offices and shops, than any other subject. Why do they not joke about the broken bridge at Ashtabula? or the Atlantic steamer going down off Mars Head with five hundred passengers? or about the Indian famine? or about the earthquake that crushed Lisbon? There is more fun in all those subjects than in this. Let us come to this subject not as critics, not as cavilers, not in a polemic spirit. Let us come to it as a question of personal safety.

Let us empty ourselves of all previous impressions, and, without any disposition to twist things, or explain them away, find out what is the announcement of the only authority on this subject that is worth so much as a pin.

1. In the first place, I group together all those passages which represent the suffering of the lost by fire. In Matthew 13, 41-43, it is said, "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Can you not explain it away? Oh, yes. I could make these angels fairies; I could represent this fire as only something looking like fire; I could represent this furnace as a casket with a crimson lining; but what is the use of explaining away a furnace of fire, when God says there is one? What is the use of an imprisoned criminal trying to explain away the existence of such a place as a prison? But you say, "Isn't there some mistake about it?" If there is, then the Al-

mighty Christ made the mistake, for the passage I quoted is part of his sermon. I appeal to Paul on this subject. He was no coward. Instead of his trembling before governments, governments trembled before him. A small invalid, but the most magnificent man of the ages. What does he say? He says to the Thessalonians, "The Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be revealed from heaven with mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God." I appeal to St. John the inspired. In one place, he says of the lost, "They shall be tormented with fire and brimstone." In another place, he says, "The adulterers, the sorcerers, and all liars shall have their place in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." And in another place, he says, "They shall both be cast alive into the lake of fire."

The last book of the Bible closes with a dark scroll on the sky. What is it? Smoke. Where there is no fire there is no smoke. "The smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever and ever." "But," you say, "were not they men who wrote this?" Yes, but they were inspired men. If you do not want to take even inspired men, then I go back to Christ again, and, as my first quotation on this subject was from Christ, so my last quotation under this head shall be from Christ, as he says, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." "But," you say, "isn't this figurative?" I am not opposed to saying it may be figurative; but I know very well that if it is not fire it is something as severe as fire. Christ and his apostles were not lacking in illustrative power, and when they say a thing is morning, I know it is as bright as it can be; and when they say anything is a prison, I know it is a galling thralldom; and when they say anything is fire, I know it is torment unmitigated. I often hear people explain these fiery representations of Scripture as metaphor, and as soon as they make metaphor out of them, they seem to think they have soothed the whole subject.

No; if there be a mental state as sharp and severe as fire, it might as well be fire. Christ and his apostles use the figure of fire, and I know from that there is nothing more painful or more ago-

nizing. But if you want some other figure, take it. Say it is a penitentiary, iron-bolted, iron-barred, iron-locked, the doors opening in and not out. I will not dispute with you. If you will, say it is a maelstrom which dashes and breaks to pieces and swallows down all those that come within the sweep of its foaming circles. I will not dispute with you. If you prefer those human similes, take them. I prefer God's comparison, because I know God is right and human comparisons may be wrong. God says it is fire, and a furnace of fire.

Besides that, I do not know that it is figurative. It may be literal. The Bible sixteen times says it is fire. You say, "I don't believe it, and I won't believe it." Then be consistent, and pitch your Bible into the stove, or throw it into the East river. Thomas Paine was consistent in denying the doctrine of eternal punishment, for he rejected the whole Bible, although in his last moments he howled with so much terror that his nurse fled from the room. He was consistent, nevertheless. Voltaire was consistent in rejecting the doctrines of future punishment, because he rejected the whole Bible, although he did not seem to be so very well persuaded of the non-existence of perdition, for, when his friend wrote to him, "I have found out for sure that there is no hell," Voltaire replied, "I congratulate you; I am not so fortunate as you are." But still he was tolerably consistent, for as well as he could he rejected the whole Bible.

But you have a Bible in your hand, you have a Bible in your bedroom, you have a Bible in your nursery, you have a Bible in your parlor. Your children have Bibles, and all these Bibles say that there is a world of fire for those who do not escape on a certain condition which I will mention. Now, overboard with your Bible, or overboard with your unbelief. Keeping both your Bible and your unbelief, you stultify yourself beyond all other possibility of stultification.

2. The next thing I have to do is to group all those passages which show the indignation of God against sin and the sinner, and

hence the possibility of such a place as I have spoken of. Out of a hundred of our sermons, ninety-eight of them are on the love of God, the mercy of God, the kindness of God; and if we preach two sermons, out of the one hundred, in regard to the indignation of God, we are styled "sulphuric." Our American preaching needs to be reconstructed as to this doctrine of God's indignation. So recreant are we, the American clergy, on this subject, that the vast majority of people do not know that the Bible speaks of the wrath of God as truly as of the love of God. Not because God has more wrath than mercy, but because he knew the world would be slow to believe it.

We have not enough backbone of moral courage to preach the whole Bible. So we go on preaching a one-sided God, with a character which we would despise in ourselves. Do you ever get angry? Suppose a ruffian should knock your little girl into the gutter—would you smile about it? would you reward him for it? Suppose, passing down the street, you saw three or four masons, with hods of brick on their shoulders, going up a long ladder, and some one should come to the foot of the ladder and hurl it away, and the three or four masons should dash down and lose their lives—would you smile about it? would you reward him for it? No. There are a hundred things in your life that excite your indignation, and if you are never aroused in that way it is because you are imbecile. Yet, what do men say of God? Why, that the whole race can go on defying him, breaking his laws, murdering his only-begotten Son, striking in the face the Lord Almighty, and he will smile on them through all eternity. Bible-holders, I want you to recognize the fact that God in the Bible more often speaks of his indignation than he does of his mercy. Twenty-eight times does the Bible speak of the love of God. Sixty-one times does it speak of his wrath and his indignation. Here is Cruden's *Concordance*. Count the passages for yourselves.

Now, can we preach the whole Bible without preaching the indignation of God as well as the love of God? I will give you some

of the passages which show the Lord's indignation, and hence the possibility of such a place as I am speaking of. In Thessalonians: "Taking vengeance on them that know not God." In Revelation: "They shall drink of the wine of the wrath of Almighty God, poured without mixture into the cup of his indignation." The figure, you see, is a pitcher and a bowl. Into the pitcher are compressed the clusters that have grown under the hot sun of indignation; and then the wine, seething, bubbling, is poured out from the pitcher into the bowl, and the lost soul, putting trembling hands to that bowl, presses it to the lips and drinks the draught until all the contents are drained (Rev., 14).

You do not like the figure? It is not mine. "Thus saith the Lord. They shall drink of the wine of the wrath of Almighty God, poured without mixture into the cup of his indignation."

In another place, the Bible says, "The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness." In other words, the darkness of the Mamartine dungeon, the darkness of Egypt. All the darkneses of the earth are not thick enough to symbolize it, and so the Bible seeks for something beyond all these darkneses. "The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into *outer* darkness," and over that abyss we are all suspended, unless we escape on one condition, to be mentioned at a later point. It is too early to mention it.

What does a man want to know of a life-raft when he is sure of no shipwreck? Not persuaded yet? Revelation: "The wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." Not yet persuaded that there is a wrath-side as well as a love-side to the Almighty? and this passage perhaps you have never heard quoted: "And the people shall be as burnings of lime; as thorns cut up shall they be burned up in the fire. Hear, ye that are afar off, what I have done, and ye that are near acknowledge my might." Not yet persuaded? I quote once more Isaiah, sixty-third chapter: "I will tread them in my wrath and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment."

Does that quotation irritate you with me? I did not say it. "Thus saith the Lord." Not persuaded with what Samuel says, and Micah says, and Daniel says, and Jeremiah says, and Ezekiel says, and Paul says, and Christ says, and Jehovah says? Not persuaded? Then I shall have to leave you to be persuaded by your own experience, when the truth of God's burnished throne shall flame on you. The fact is that if you are a Bible believer, by this time, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, you are persuaded that there is a hell.

I have nothing much to do with objections in this treatise. I will simply state that God, fifty-six times in the plainest, most unmistakable, stupendous, and overwhelming way, declares that there is a hell. It is burning now. It has been burning a long while. Yea, I will go further, and say there is a possibility that some reader of these words may spend eternity in the lost world. Nothing but the hand of an outraged, defied, insulted, long-suffering, indignant, omnipotent God keeps any of us this moment from sliding into it.

I received a letter on this subject. The writer of it evidently believes there is no future place of punishment. He says in his letter: "I don't believe that which you preach, but I am certain you believe it. I prefer to hear you expound the Bible, because you do not ignore hell; for if the foundation of your faith is true, hell is just as certain as paradise, and has just as much of a locality." Now I understand it. Men want us to be frank in the declaration of our beliefs. All the world knows that the leading denominations in this day believe that there is a hell as certainly as that there is a heaven. Why, then, slur over the fact, or try to hide it, or declare it only with slight emphasis? I am an old fogey in my interpretation of the Bible. I have not so much intellect as those men who know how to make an eternity of their own, spinning it out of their own brain. Not having intellect enough to fashion an eternity of my own, I must take the theory of the Bible. I believe there is a hell. If I had not been afraid of hell, I do not

think I should have started for heaven. You say, "I will not be scared in that way. I will not be affrighted by any future punishment." You are quite mistaken. I can frighten you half to death in five minutes. As you are walking along the streets, let me pull down the house-scaffolding, weighing two or three tons, about your head, and you will look as white as a sheet, while your heart will thump like a trip-hammer. Now, if it is not ignoble to be affrighted about a falling scaffold, is it ignoble to be affrighted by a threat from the Omnipotent God, who with one stroke of his right hand could crush the universe? You ask how God, being a father, could let us suffer in the future world? I answer your question by asking how God, being a father, can let suffering be in this world? Tell me why he allowed that woman to whom I administered the holy sacrament this afternoon to have a cancer; tell me why children suffer such pains in teething, the lancet striking such torture in the swollen gums. You fail to explain to me suffering in the present time; be not surprised if I fail to explain to you suffering in the future.

3. Has not the time come for me to say that, though there is a hell, there is no need that any one should go there? I am going to announce to you that five or ten may escape—yea, a hundred—yea, a thousand—yea, ALL. You say, "Tell me, just now." Oh, my skeptical reader, I do not want to break on you the glad tidings too suddenly. I want to tell you that there is no more need that you go to that world than that you should leap into the geysers of California, or the crater of Cotopaxi. If any one goes there he is a suicide of his immortal soul.

I turn to the same old book, and I find out that the Son of Mary, who was the Son of God, the darling of heaven, the champion of the ages, by some called Lord, by some called Jesus, by others called Christ, but by me here called by the three blessed titles, Lord Jesus Christ, by one magnificent stroke made it possible for us all to be saved. He not only told us that there was a hell, but he went into it. He walked down the fiery steeps. He stepped off

the bottom rung of the long ladder of despair. He descended into hell. He put his foot on the coal of the furnace. He explored the darkest den of eternal midnight, and then he came forth, lacerated, and scarified, and bleeding, and mauled by the hands of infernal excretion, to cry out to all the ages, "I have paid the price for all those who would make me their substitute. By my piled-up groans, by my omnipotent agony, I demand the rescue of all those who will give up sin, and trust in me." Mercy! mercy! mercy! But how am I to get it? Cheap. It will not cost you as much as a loaf of bread. Only a penny? No, no. Escape from hell, and all the harps and mansions and thrones and sunlit fields of heaven besides in the bargain, "without money and without price."

Now, I ask every common-sense man and common-sense woman, if one has a choice between heaven and hell, and he may escape the one, and he may win the other, and he refuses to do so—I ask you, if he does not deserve to be lost? He does. You know he does. Do not, my friend, make it a controversy between you and me; it is a controversy between you and God.

But I decline to think that the majority of the human race will be finally discomfited. We are in the early morning of Christian achievement. Soon the tides will turn, and nations will be born in a day; the path of life will be thronged, and the road of sin and death become positively lonesome,—and after a while utterly forsaken; not one traveler will be found there, and it will become a matter of amazement to the following centuries that any man could turn his back on God and happiness, when all the reasonable inducements were heavenward. The finally lost as compared with the finally saved will be as the people now in prisons when compared to the uncounted multitudes outside of them.

T. de Witt Talmage