

CHAPTER 13
The Epistle to the Hebrews
THE FOURTH WARNING (Hebrews 10:26-39)
by G. H. Lang

The unregenerate wishes that God would let him alone and not frighten him with threats of judgment. Similarly can the weak heart of the believer wish that he might be left to enjoy a carnal condition and not be disturbed by solemn warnings. But God loves both the one and the other too well to indulge them thus.

Privilege must be balanced by responsibility, and responsibility undischarged must involve penalty. Grace can be abused to the dishonour of God and the injury of man; and therefore grace itself imposes penalties upon the abuse of itself. Thus everything is of grace, including wrath. Because God is love He warns and chastises, and very severely when necessary, if only so can the ends of love be served. The passage before us is an instance, but because its statements are severe they must be examined with strictness.

The statement assumes that the persons in view can sin in a particular manner, and tells them that if they do so serious consequences will follow.

I. *The Persons addressed.*

i. "We." Who are intended? The Writer uses the pronoun with emphasis several times. Let the following places be considered and it will be seen that the "we" includes the Writer, and must therefore mean the Christian circle of which he was a member: 2:1, 3; 3:6; 4:13; 7:26; 10:39; 12:1, 25; 13:6. It is impossible to say that each and that entire circle, including the Writer, were mere professors, unregenerate, deceived or deceiving. Therefore the warnings apply to real Christians.

ii. They had received a *knowledge of the truth*. *Epignosis* means a personal experimental knowledge. Such a knowledge these had received, not merely had an offer of it, a possibility of acquiring it; they had embraced the offer and had gained this experimental knowledge. "By the very choice of the word the Writer gives us to understand that he means, not merely a superficial, historical knowledge about the truth, but a living perception of the same by faith, which had seized upon it [the truth] and fused it into oneness with itself" (Delitzsch).

This is parallel with 6:4 above; those there in view had been thoroughly enlightened and had received a real appreciation of the heavenly gift and of the word of God.

iii. ver. 29. The blood of the covenant had sanctified them. See ch. XII, 2, iv, p. 165. They had regarded that blood as sacred and themselves as dedicated to God by reason of it. This dedication had wrought out in them its due practical results, and had thus shown its reality, for (ver. 32—35).

iv. They had endured severe persecution, “a great conflict of sufferings.” This had involved reproaches, afflictions, and fellowship with fellow-saints in the like furnace, and espousing the cause of the imprisoned, so exposing themselves to arrest. Moreover they had enjoyed such a living, invigorating assurance of their heavenly inheritance as to be positively joyful when robbed of their earthly possessions. Both the law and the mobs attacked them but they had faced both with boldness.

Will anything less than an experimental enjoyment of Christ enable such suffering for His sake? Obviously they were such as Peter describes in his first epistle (1:3-9, who had been born again, who had a living hope of the heavenly inheritance, who had faith and were therefore being guarded by the power of God, who rejoiced greatly in their as yet unseen Saviour, and were already receiving a real measure of their salvation.

v. ver. 30. But, as if to put the matter beyond dispute, the Writer applies to them the words of Moses to Israel, “The Lord shall judge *His people*,” in which place it is no question of His enemies, avowed or secret, but of His own people, and particularly that remnant of His people who had failed badly, were to be chastised severely, and yet should be saved ultimately (Deut. 32:35-43).

Indeed, so certainly were those addressed by the Writer really the people of God walking the way of life, that all they needed was endurance, steadfastness, perseverance on that way until the Coming One should come and they should receive the promised inheritance (ver. 36-38).

If this measure of proof was adduced *only* to show that these addressed were regenerate persons within the scope of the new covenant it would be considered ample to establish the point. This is questioned by some only when put in relation to the accompanying warnings. But it is a pernicious way of treating adequate proof to argue around it merely because it may involve problems, difficulties, and a challenge to one’s prepossessions or even convictions.

However severe the warnings here given, however difficult it may seem to harmonize them with the eternal security of the believer, however many cherished dispensational opinions may be challenged, there is really only one honest way of dealing with the passage, which is to apply it to real children of God and accept the consequences of doing this.

2. *The Sin.*

i. *It is willful.* The word (*hekousios*) takes strong emphasis “*willfully* sinning we.” It is found elsewhere only at I Pet. 5:2, where shepherds are exhorted to tend the flock “not of constraint, but *willingly*,” with their whole and free will. Its root *hekousios* comes only at Philemon 14, where Philemon was encouraged to act “not as of necessity, but of *free will*.”

The sin therefore is deliberate, determined, committed with full intention. Thus it is by no means a case of a sudden temptation causing an unintended fall, or even of succumbing often to a tyrannous habit which one loathes and fights, even if unavailingly.

ii. It is *continuous, maintained*, as is shown by the *present* participle, *hamartanontdn*. It is willfully maintaining a decision made against light, for

iii. This decision is made after having received and enjoyed that experimental knowledge of the truth above considered.

iv. It is thus *comparable to the sin against the law* of Moses described by the word *athetisas* (ver. 28). This word means to reject (1 Tim. 5:12; Luke 7:30), to treat as void (Gal. 2:21; 3:15), to set aside as useless (1 Cor. 1:19), to spurn a person (Luke 10:16; John 12:48); or, as the cognate noun *athetisis* means in this Epistle (7:18), to displace one thing and replace it by another, or to dismiss a matter entirely, treat it as not existing (9:26). Thus a man might “set at naught” the law of Moses. Here also the participle used denotes an act done deliberately and by which the doer stood firm.

There is an instance of such conduct. In plain defiance of the oft-announced law of the sabbath a man gathered firing on that day (Num. 15:32-36). A special inquiry was made of God as to His mind and will, and by special instruction from God the offender was stoned to death.

This solemn example is appended to and illustrates the immediately preceding regulations which directed that if a person, or even the whole congregation, sinned by error unwittingly, the priest should make atonement and the error would be forgiven; but if the sin was deliberate death must follow, provided adequate evidence established guilt (Num. 15: 22—31).

Later, the sin of Achan included these elements and involved this penalty; and presumably because his family could not but have been privy to his act, seeing that he hid the articles in the ground in their common tent, they all shared his judgment; and their possessions also became involved, on the same principle that Adam’s sin brought desolation over the realm he ruled (Josh. 7).

The severity of such penalties is because of the enormity of the sin Godward. After providing for the pardon of unrecognized sin the direction said: "But the soul that doeth ought with a high hand, whether he be homeborn or a foreigner, the same *blasphemeth Jehovah*; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath *despised the word of Jehovah*, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall be utterly cut off, his iniquity shall be upon him," that is, it shall not be transferred to a substitute, a victim on the altar (Num. 15:30, 31).

This refusal by God of the benefit of atoning. Sacrifice, when sin was deliberate, persistent, continued against light and remonstrance, was declared by Jehovah Himself in His words to Samuel: "And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated with sacrifice nor offering for every' (I Sam. 3:14).

The word *despised* has two important Old Testament illustrations: "He is despised and rejected of men" (Isa. 53: 3), and "Esau despised his birthright" (Gen. 25:34). Deliberate disobedience to a known command of God is equal to such wickedness as the rejection of His Son and of His gifts. To a high priest himself (Eli), because he had tolerated evil conduct that he ought to have punished, the sentence was given that his family should lose their priestly position, "for they that despise me [the same word] shall be lightly esteemed" (I Sam. 2:30).

v. *The Sin defined.* The sin in question is now specified and includes three particulars.

(1) It is a *treading under foot the Son of God.*

This word *tread down* (*katapateo*) is used of men treading into the dust or mire salt that has been thrown away (Matt. 5:13); of swine trampling on pearls, articles precious to men but useless to swine (Matt. 7:6); of seed trodden down on the roadside (Luke 8:5); and of unfortunate persons trampled upon by a surging crowd (Luke 12:1). In the Greek Old Testament it is used of men crushing serpents with their feet (Ps. 91:13) and of a wild beast treading down a thistle or an egg in its way (II Chron. 25:18; Job 39:15).

These instances combine the notions of an action being intentional (as when a man grinds down a viper), contemptuous, violent, and destructive. The sin now in question treats thus the Son of God. Such conduct is evidently like that blaspheming and despising of God condemned under the law, and is therefore liable to the same penalty.

(2) But it is clearly impossible to take up such an antagonistic attitude to the Son of God and not thereby to reject His atoning death; for one who values His blood will honour His person, while he who despises Him will despise His sacrifice. Thus the sin in

question involves a repudiation of redemption and sanctification by the blood of Christ.

This offender had acknowledged that the blood had redeemed him and had set him apart unto God. It was therefore sacred blood. Now he denies this and says that the blood of Christ was only common (*koinon*) blood, like that of any other man. This implies that Jesus was not the Son of God but only a man. It is the Unitarian position, whether taken by such as perversely claim to be Christian, or by deists, Jews, or Moslems. Such a person of necessity puts himself outside of the new covenant, for this is attested, "sealed," by the blood of Christ, and would have no validity apart therefrom.

(3) Such conduct involves an equal outrage upon the Holy Spirit, because He witnesses to Christ as the Son of God (John 14:26; 15: 26, 27; 16:14), and it is He Who makes operative and peace-giving the blood of Christ, Whose power indeed it was that energized the Redeemer to shed that atoning blood (ch. 9:14; 10:22; I John 5:6-8).

That the sin in question is deeper, intenser than the "grieving" of the Spirit against which every Christian needs to watch is shown by the further strong term employed (*enubrizo*), to do "despite" to the Spirit. Its root *hubris* means to damage severely, as a tempest a ship (Acts 27:10, 21). It is therefore employed by Paul to indicate the "injuries" he received by the violence of persecutors (II Cor. 12:10). In Rom. 1:30 its noun *hubristes* follows "hateful to God" as meaning "*insolent*" men, of whom Paul himself was a prominent example (1 Tim. 1:13). Here he joins the word with blaspheming and persecuting, showing the kind of conduct meant. This is further shown by the use of the verb *hubrizo* to describe the insulting and murderous treatment by the wicked husbandmen of the servants of the owner of the vineyard. Christ used it of the outrageous conduct with which the Romans would treat Himself (Luke 18:32), and it is used of the similar treatment planned against Paul and Barnabas at Iconium (Acts 14:5), and which Paul did actually receive at Philippi (1 Thess. 2:2). The one other use of the word shows how strongly the lawyers resented the sword-thrusts of Christ: "Teacher, saying these things thou dost insult us also" (Luke 11:45). The persons here in view despise the Word of God incarnate as their ancestors had despised His word through Moses (Num. 15:31).

Thus this sin is more and worse than even a prolonged lapse into worldly and evil ways, sad and dangerous as this is. It is directed knowingly, deliberately, wantonly, fiercely against the Son of God, the blood of God incarnate, the Spirit of God, and the word of God.

(4) If it be now asked whether it is conceivable that one who has been born again, has been really and knowingly sanctified by the blood of Christ, and has enjoyed some true benefit under the new covenant can lapse so utterly as thus to act, the answer is that it is not only conceivable but it has taken place in known and modern instances.

A case known to me personally has been mentioned above when dealing with the warning of ch. 6. Whether Edmund Gosse was really regenerate as a youth is hard to say, but he took that stand, and *Father and Son*, is proof how utterly and bitterly he later rejected evangelical truth. But a quite indisputable instance in the last century was F. W. Newman, the brilliant scholar, and brother of the Cardinal. In early manhood he was accepted as a sincere believer by men well qualified to judge, the first leaders of the Brethren. Such men as J. N. Darby, J. G. Bellett, Lord Congleton, and A. N. Groves were not likely to be unitedly misled. Yet Newman utterly apostatized from the faith. Readers of his *Phases of Faith* will have seen a painful fulfillment of the description we have studied. In particular the attack on Christ Himself was calculated, determined, and blasphemous. But at the close of his long life, of which perhaps half was spent in opposing the truth and deluding men, he crept back at last to the shelter of the blood he had slighted; for, as before mentioned (p. 102), by his own request it was stated over his grave that he died trusting for salvation to the precious blood of Christ.

It is as certain that a Christian can so apostatize as that the sun can suffer eclipse, and the question is as to the situation that arises in such a case as that of Newman.

As touching the opinion of his fellow men he had nothing to gain or to lose by what might be said over his grave, so it must be assumed that his change of mind was sincere. This they must have believed who stated it publicly, and this charity requires us to accept, especially as there is other evidence in support. His repentance, then, being sincere and his recovered faith real, though so belated, can it be otherwise than that it was accepted by God? Has He not promised, "Return unto me, saith Jehovah of hosts, and I will return unto you, saith Jehovah of hosts" (Zech. 1:3), and is it not written in both Testaments that "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved"? (Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:13). Is it conceivable that God shall deny the saving shelter of the blood of His Son to even the deepest dyed sinner that seeks it? We are bound to presume the eternal deliverance from hell of every such repentant sinner, because of the value of Christ to the Father. The Son Himself said that blasphemy against Himself is forgivable (Matt. 12:31, 32; Mark 3:28; Luke 1:10). See *Note A*, p. 196.

3. *The Penalty Denounced.* But what now becomes of the penalty of such sin? And what *is* the penalty? If it is not eternal what is it, and when and where is it exacted?

i. *The Penalty is inescapable*, because as regards such conduct "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (ver. 26). The histories illuminate this.

David, a man after God's heart, lapsed into adultery and murder. For either of these crimes the penalty was death; under the law of Moses there remained no sacrifice that could be accepted (Deut. 22:22; Exod. 21:12-14). This explains why David, speaking of that occasion, said, "Thou delightest not in sacrifice; else would I give it: thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a

broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 51:16,17). But upon his repentance and public confession the word came: “The Lord also hath *put away* thy sin; thou shalt not die”—the capital sentence is remitted (2 Sam. 12:13). Of course, his sin had been put away on the ground of what Christ was to do for David. It is an instance of the “passing over of sins done aforetime” (Rom. 3:25).

But continues the prophet: “thou shalt not die. *Howbeit*, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme” punishment was to follow David to the end of his life. The next eight chapters detail the exacting of these penalties, which were truly severe.

This extended history of the sin of a man of God and its consequences establishes the principle that the remitting of the full and extreme penalty of sin does not cancel the inflicting of severe temporal penalties. To discern this is of vast importance for understanding the effect of the redemption wrought by Christ at the cross. That redemption cancels the penalty of eternal death for every true believer, but it does not deliver him from present and temporal consequences of sin. Richard Weaver, the renowned evangelist, never lost the headaches caused by the batterings received when he was a prizefighter. The cross of Christ does not guarantee that a Christian shall not go to prison should he steal.

On the contrary, God the more resolutely chastises His children *because* they are His children: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities” (Amos 3:2); “if we discerned ourselves we should not be judged. But when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with [at the same time as] the world” (I Cor. 11:31, 32). For the explanation given by Peter of the fiery trials of saints is that “the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God” (I Pet. 4:17), which term is taken from Ezek. 9:5, 6. Such parental chastisement is not eternal but temporal, but it is not to be escaped: the Father scourgeth every son whom he receiveth,” only not for his destruction but for his sanctification (Heb.12: 6,10).

ii. *The Penalty is severe.* The punishment must fit the crime or there will be a failure of justice. It is a *just* recompense that must be inflicted on each and every case (2:2). “He scourgeth every son.” Scourging is very painful. It is *punishment* against which the Writer warns us. The word *timoria* comes here only, but Paul twice used its verb to describe the hard penalties he inflicted upon Christians for what he considered their crime in being Christians (Acts 22:5; 26:11). See *Note B* at end of this chapter, p. 201.

Atoning sacrifice having been rejected and so not being available, what remains? What is to be expected?—only a strict trial as to the offence (*krisis*) and the consequent punishment. This is described as “fearful,” something to be feared greatly, for it is a “fierceness of fire, which shall devour the adversaries” (ver. 27).

This word “adversary” is to be noted. *Hupenantios* comes again only at Col. 2:14, where it describes the law as setting itself against the transgressors. So have those here in question set themselves against the Son of God, they are antagonistic to Him. The Greek Old Testament uses similar phrases and words at Isa. 26:11: “fire shall devour thine adversaries,” and see Isa. 64:2.

Again the histories illuminate the matter.

(i) Lev. 10. Two sons of Aaron, consecrated to be priests, on the very day of their consecration violated a most solemn requirement of God, even that the fire upon which incense was to be burned unto Jehovah should be taken from the altar of burnt offering; which meant that that fire was connected with atonement for sin and therefore was “holy” fire. These two priests used other fire, and thus presumed to offer worship and intercession apart from sacrifice and atoning blood, “and there came forth fire from before Jehovah and devoured them, and they died before Jehovah” (Lev. 10:2). Those to-day who justify innovations in the church, the house of God, on the ground that these are *not* forbidden in Scripture should ponder the fact that Nadab and Abihu died because they did something which the Lord “had *not* commanded them.

(2) Num. 16:35. Again, Korah and his associates, being only Levites, presumed to act as priests, in defiance of God’s appointment that it was the latter only who should present incense before Him (Num. 16:40; 1 Sam. 2:28; 2 Chron. 13:10, 11); and “fire came forth from before Jehovah and devoured” them.

(3) Num. 11:1. Once more: “the people were as murmurs, which was evil in the ears of Jehovah: and when Jehovah heard it, his anger was kindled; and the fire of Jehovah burnt among them, and devoured.”

In the Greek Old Testament the word translated in these places “devour” *katesthio* comes from the word *esthio* used by our Writer in “devour the adversaries.”

The severity of the judgment is further indicated by the figure “a *fierceness* of fire,” which corresponds to the instances given from Leviticus and Numbers. And this is to be expected, for the persons in question by rejecting grace have necessarily exposed themselves to the rigours of the law, and that extreme rigour which excludes mercy.

iii. *New Testament instances*

(i) Acts 5. At the beginning of the old covenant period two priests fell dead in the house of God because of sin committed in that house (Lev. 10). At the beginning of the new covenant period two Christians fell dead in the house of God, because of sin committed in that house. The punishment was as severe in the latter case as the former.

(2) 1 Cor. 5: 1-6. Because of fornication a Christian in the Corinthian church was handed over to Satan for the destruction of his bodily life. That he was a child of God is certain from the fact that this devouring judgment would be only temporal, and was part of the process by which his spirit would be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Notice the “that” in ver. 5 (*hina* with the subjunctive) in order that, etc. Here is definite proof that bodily death under the judgment of God, inflicted by Satan, does not necessarily involve eternal death. Therefore “fierceness of fire” does not of necessity mean *eternal* fire.

That Christians can so sin is clear from the warning that *all* in that church might become corrupted even as “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.”

(3) 1 Cor. 11:29-32. And in fact others of that church were already leavened—they were so polluting the table of the Lord that heavy judgment was being inflicted, by bodily weakness, actual illness, and even premature death.

(4) James 5:19, 20. “My brethren [such are the persons in view], if any among you [not one of the world outside] do err from the truth [therefore he had hitherto walked the way of truth, or he could not turn from it], and one turn him back [into the true way]; let him know that the one turning back a sinner [*hamartolos*, strictly, one who has missed the way] from the error of his way shall save the life of him [*psuchen autou*] out of death [from dying], and shall cover a multitude of sins”; for when a backslider repents and returns his sins are covered by the blood of Christ. Plainly such a one, unless he turns back, is in danger of reaching the extreme of backsliding and his life being cut off.

(5) 1 John 5:16,17. And this is contemplated by the solemn statement that “there is sin unto death; not concerning this do I say that he should make request.” The Great Priest can have compassion on the ignorant and the erring (Heb. 5:2), but not upon those who sin with a high hand. Of such it is written: “Be not merciful to any *wicked* transgressors” (Ps. 59:5), which persons answer to the sinning willfully of our passage.

This consensus of Scripture shows that the passage before us is in harmony with the regular administration of the laws of the kingdom of God, to which administration of justice the children of the Sovereign are amenable. It would be truly disastrous if the royal family were suffered to defy the law with impunity. In the kingdom of God this is unthinkable. He it is Who has declared of Himself, “Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense,” that is, It is My special business, to which I attend personally, particularly as regards My people: “The Lord shall judge His people.”

iv. *Sorer Punishment* (ver. 29).

(1) To a normally sensitive soul a death by stoning must have been a painful scene. The first stone might kill, or it might take many; and at the end there lay a poor battered corpse. Death by fire was startling and terrifying. It left a charred, disfigured body as a warning against sin. “Of *how much sorer* punishment, think ye, shall he be

judged worthy” who has sinned against both the Son and the Spirit of God?

The question is asked but not answered. The reader is challenged to think it over. Few, it is to be feared, do this or are willing to do it.

The question brings to mind solemn words of the Lord: “Whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble *it is profitable* for him [Mark 9:42, “it were *better* for him “] that a great millstone [*i.e.*, a millstone so great as not to be turned by hand but requiring an ass] should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18: 6).

In the thoughtful mind such questions start a deeper question. What punishment conceivable as to this present life can be thought of as more severe than premature death by stoning, drowning, or fire? Yet evidently something more severe is possible or a violent death were not to be preferred, were not better than it. But if it is something more dreadful than such a death must it not be after death?

An answer is not difficult for those who say that a child of God may lose salvation and be cast into the lake of fire for ever. That was certainly a more severe punishment than the worst this earth-life can bring.

But what answer can we give who assert that no child of God can be lost eternally? The many give no answer at all, but ignore such passages and problems; while such as at all face the question treat such scriptures but superficially, avoid their plain terms and force, and say the persons in question were never regenerated by faith in Christ.

If the attitude of such must be stated plainly and firmly it amounts to this: that backsliders may be calmly consigned to everlasting damnation, but theories as to the nature of the Divine grace, opinions as to the membership and future of the church of God, dispensational schemes, and popular notions as to the state after death, these must on no account be challenged or revised. If any reader is of this mind he naturally will not further pursue our present inquiries, even if he has read so far.

(2) What effect did our Lord design to produce by these following words from Luke 12:1-12? He is talking firstly to His own disciples (ver. 1). Crowds of others are listening, but “first of all,” that is, very especially, it is to disciples to whom the teaching is directed. He warns them against hypocrisy, the leaven of the Pharisees. Followers of Him must be utterly sincere, as He was. He stresses that nothing that is ever said or done is really secret. All is known by that invisible world that is all around us, and they will duly make it known, to our praise or confusion. To live with such sincerity, simplicity, transparency (Phil. 1:10, *eilikrines* translucent) will provoke the hatred of the Prince of darkness and his sons, and will involve the sons of light in conflicts and dangers.

Therefore the Lord continues:

“I say to you, my friends [my personal friends, *philoï*], be not afraid of them who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will make clear to you (*hypodeiknumi*) whom ye shall fear: Fear him, who after he hath killed hath authority to cast into Gehenna; yea, I say unto you, fear him.” Matt. 10:28 is parallel to this place in Luke, but has the enlargement that men may kill the body, but the soul they are not able to kill, but that God “is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.”

As said above, we must interpret strictly.

The Lord did *not* say that God *would* cast into Gehenna any friends of His Son, but He does warn them to hold in due respect One Who is able to do this. Obviously such an One, not puny man, is the proper Person to fear, and in Whose fear to order one’s life. But what Christ’s words do make clear is that there *is* such a thing as punishment beyond this life on earth: “after he hath killed,” God can do more.

As to Gehenna, it is to be observed that the term is twice used figuratively. In Jas. 3:6 an evil tongue is said to be “set on fire by Gehenna.” Here all the expressions are figurative. By the “tongue” is meant the thoughts which the tongue is used to express. By “fire” is meant the scorching hurtful influence of bitter thoughts. By Gehenna is intended the, as we say, “hellish” spirit that inspires and inflames such speech. In Matt. 23:15 are words of the Lord as to the Pharisees and their converts from the heathen: “Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him two-fold more a son of Gehenna than yourselves”; that is, in all that is hateful to God, in spirit and influence, he, with the intensity of a pervert, becomes twice as “hellish” as his instructor.

Matt. 5:21, 22 are possibly in the background of the words of James above, for the Lord was then speaking of the evil use of the tongue in uttering reviling words, such as *Raca*, an expression of strong contempt, or more, a term of stem condemnation and scorn. One who went to this length rendered himself liable to Gehenna. In ver. 29, 30 of this chapter the Lord said that if eye or hand was an occasion of stumbling it were better to destroy those members “and not thy whole body go into Gehenna.”

In Mark 9:41-50, this teaching is reported as given by the Lord on another occasion, which repetition suggests that He thought it important to impress it upon His followers. Yet most have neglected it. On this second occasion the Lord enlarged His remarks by a contrast: “it is better for thee to go into life maimed, rather than having thy two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire [or] halt, rather than having thy two feet to be cast into Gehenna, . . . [or] it is good for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into Gehenna, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.”

On a still later occasion Christ pressed on the scribes and Pharisees the fearful challenge, "Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of Gehenna?" (Matt. 23:33).

The above twelve passages are all where the word is found in the New Testament. What lies behind the teaching is well known. Among the Jews ordinary offences were dealt with in local courts; more serious cases were taken before a Council, or High Court, where sentence of death could be passed; and where for the most flagrant crimes the punishment could be aggravated by the refusal of burial and the corpse of the offender being flung, with the offal of the city, into the ever-burning fires maintained for the purpose in Gehenna, the valley of Hinnom outside the city.

(3) We shall not inquire into the varying notions floating at the time in the minds of men as to the realm of the dead, but shall seek here to learn only from Scripture. This at least is clear, that Christ intended more than the casting of the corpse into the fires of Hinnom, for (a) He speaks of what God can do to a man after his death, not what the Council could do; (b) that in the Gehenna intended the soul can be destroyed, which of course could not take place at Hinnom; and (c) if the latter were meant then the warning has never applied generally, nor at all since those fires died out.

There is therefore something possible after death, something to be feared because fearful, of which they who cause young believers to stumble ought to be afraid, and which they who apostatize from Christ ought to expect (Heb. 10:27). They are to *expect* it. How contrary is this to the easy-going complacency which our vain hearts love and which some views popular among Christians encourage.

And is not this outlook just what a sound judgment *would* expect from the inflexible justice of our God? For "if ye call on Him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear" (1 Pet. 1:13-22). For your Father is also judge, and the former relationship does not suspend or weaken the latter office. Your standard of heart and life is to be nothing lower than His holiness, and the redemption by which you benefit is in order that you may purify your souls and walk in that love which stumbles no one but builds up all. This Judge knows no respect of persons and does not indulge His own family in sin.

The case of F. W. Newman has been cited. Him personally we cannot judge, but he is typical of others. He spent perhaps forty years using a splendid intellect, vast learning, wide opportunities in Universities and otherwise, in poisoning many minds against Christ. His sadly belated, almost deathbed acknowledgment of Christ was known to but very few and could not and did not undo the desperate harm done to very many in this life and, it is to be feared, for eternity.

Granted, as we are thoroughly persuaded, that the death of Christ secures exemption from the *eternal* doom deserved, does it, ought it, to exempt such a one from

temporal punishment? It did not so exempt David from penalties for his evil example; but he endured them in this life. If such penalties were deserved by David when are they to be endured by Newman? He lived in comfort, respected by the world, and died in quietness. We repeat that we use him purely as typical of a class of men, and to give point to our reflections. What his actual experiences have been or may be is not here the point. Of this of course we know nothing. Our inquiry is whether such an apostate ought not to have *expected* a fierceness of fire that should deal with him as an adversary of the Son of God, and whether such an expectation might have effectually prevented him from apostatizing? For this is a design of such warnings.

v. *Gehenna and the Reality.*

(1) What can we learn as to the reality that our Lord had in mind as answering to the valley of Hinnom? It seems very little; much is left indefinite. Some able and devout students identify Gehenna and the lake of fire of Rev. 20, and have regarded the latter as the place of temporary punishment after death for evil-living Christians. Yet Scripture does not plainly identify them, and in so solemn a matter we decline inferences and assumptions. As to both places the Scripture leaves some unresolved problems, as if to debar positive assertions.

For example, Gehenna is not the valley of Hinnom, for the soul cannot be destroyed in the latter. Yet into what region of the realm of spirit can the human *body* be cast after death? For it too can be destroyed there; and it would seem to be the same body which men can kill which God can destroy in Gehenna: "fear not them that kill the body . . . but Him Who can destroy soul and body in Gehenna."

(2) *Dives and Lazarus.* Nor can it be stated positively that Luke 16 describes Gehenna. It might well do so, but the Lord did not say that "in Gehenna" Dives "lifted up his eyes," but in *Hades*. This is a wider word than Gehenna, and the greater could include the lesser; but here again it is not for us to be definite where strict proof is lacking.

Yet some salient features of Luke 16 may be noted.

(a) *The scene is directly after death, for the five brothers of Dives are still alive in the family residence. Hades therefore is not the place of final punishment after resurrection. Two words of Abraham are important: "now . . . here." They stand in contrast to Dives' former time and place on earth; but they also deny right to us to extend the dread scene into eternity and another place than Hades.*

(b) *There is no strict proof that Dives will be lost for ever. It is a common assumption, and it may prove true, but here also we refuse inference. This may be noted: that nothing is laid to his charge than a callous heart and a self-indulgent life. Christians can sink to this. Some in the Corinthian church sat in their love-feasts, in*

connection with which the Supper was solemnized, and ate and drank to excess while others of the Christian family sat there hungry. It was such Dives-like selfishness that the God Who is love was punishing even unto the death of some of them (1 Cor. 11:20-30).

(c) *Dives* was not utterly hardened. He had been so far stirred as to long that his brothers might not have to share his lot.

We are therefore no more able to pronounce judgment upon him than on any other individual.

(d) *Abraham* and Lazarus also were in Hades, in that region termed by the Jews “the bosom of Abraham,” and later by Christ named “Paradise” (Luke 23:43), and so Dives can see and speak with Abraham. Therefore the godly were within the earth, where Hades is, as all Scripture locates it. Comp. Ps. 16:8-11; Acts 2:25-28; Eph. 4:8-10. The theory that since Christ’s ascension all believers go to the heavenly world is wholly devoid of warrant from the Word of God, and was held by very few (if any) for above five hundred years after Christ. See the quotation near the end of the next chapter from Pearson, *The Creed*, Art. 5, (p. 230).

Were the godly already glorified they could not need resurrection. Our Epistle will tell us shortly (11:40) that saints of old “apart from us” cannot “be made perfect”; now the dead are not made perfect save by resurrection; therefore neither saints of pre-Christian times nor of this age are perfected and in glory. They await this glad consummation where Christ and the thief went at death, Paradise, Abraham’s bosom.’

It may be said that the result of this inquiry is to leave this subject of retribution after death rather vague, which is true. The fact seems established, the details are not clear. This is in harmony with a small word in the *Hebrews* passage not yet noted. Ver. 27 speaks of “a *certain [tis]* fearful expectation of judgment.”

This word *tis* does not mean that the event is sure to come to pass. It is the Greek indefinite particle, as in the expressions “a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho,” “a certain poor widow cast in two mites.” Thus while the Writer employs strong terms as to the judgment to be expected, by this particle he leaves some indefiniteness as to what that fierceness of fire will prove to be.

This element characterizes the subject of future judgments as set forth in Scripture. Thus such terms as “great white throne,” “lake of fire,” “books were opened,” refer to solemn realities, the purport being clear, but the realities themselves being obscure. Perhaps this indefiniteness adds to the deterrent power of the warnings. The unknown is more terrible than the known. Prison is less deterrent to the hardened criminal than to the first offender. The Book of God shows His divine wisdom in its appeals and warnings to our human nature. In the same way the indefiniteness of the

terms “bride,” “city,” “tree of life” and others, prompt curiosity and inquiry as to the glories awaiting the godly.

vi. It will be objected that this prospect of punishment after death for some who are ultimately to be saved savours of the Roman doctrine of purgatory. Stalwart Protestants will rush to the battle with the heaviest armaments they can command. But let the searcher for truth alone be calm.

(1) Every instructed Christian believes in purgatory in principle. The fire purges the gold that it may be fit for the king’s table. Heb. 12:10; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7, indeed the whole Bible teaches this, nor is it questioned as to the ways of God our Father with His children *in this life*.

It is therefore simply a question of whether God by His Word does or does not extend the application of this process to the life after death. No new principle as to His ways is introduced. And who shall complain, or even wonder, should He thus vindicate His justice before men and angels? It is not fully exhibited in this life, even in the case of His children. The godly do not get a full reward of virtue, nor the carnal believer the due reward of his deeds. The former rightly looks beyond death for their recompense; it is but consistent that the latter should then receive theirs.

Col. 3:25 reads “For he that doeth wrong shall receive again the wrong that he hath done [margin]; and there is no respect of persons.” On the strength of this two eminently conservative Bible students expressed positively their united conviction that the fulfillment of this warning lies beyond death. “The attempt to alleviate the text of some of its weight by suggesting that the law operates only in this life, fails, for there is nothing in the text or context to lead the reader to think other than that while the sowing is here the reaping is hereafter” (Hogg and Vine, *Touching the Coming of the Lord*, pp. 84, 85, ed. I. For further comments on this see my *Firstfruits and Harvest*, pp. 76, 77).

(2) If it be that in the period between death and resurrection the redeemed are more perfectly prepared for the latter and for the attendant prospects in the kingdom of God, ought not this to be matter for rejoicing on their behalf and of thanksgiving to the God of all grace?

(3) This differs *radically* from the Romish doctrine of purgatory, for that dogma makes suffering after death for such as go to purgatory necessary to their purification and final salvation. It is taught that beatified saints go at death direct to heaven; but these are the few; the majority must pass through purgatory on the way thither. Thus “according to the Romanists the departed have to make an atonement themselves, in the purgatorial state, for the sins they have committed when in this life” (Walter Hook, in Dr. W. F. Hook’s *Church Dictionary*, 629). See also Newman’s *Development of Christian Doctrine*, ch ix, para. 1 to 7, and Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology*, 301-303. The view argued above makes this to depend first and last, only, entirely, and

eternally upon the justifying work of Christ on the cross, imputed to the believer once and for ever when he truly repents and trusts on Christ as Saviour.

As to *standing* before God

“I stand upon *His* merit,
I know *no* other stand,
Not e'en where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.”

(4) It is worth deep and full inquiry whether it be not the case that the whole system of Roman theology, and each dogma separately, has some element of truth at its heart, truth perverted and corrupted, but there. It is to be doubted whether any one of those dogmas is undiluted error. That Church has been pre-eminently the woman that hid the leaven of error in the meal of truth; but the meal is there (Matt. 13:33).

If this is so, it is to be expected that in even their doctrine of purgatory there is an element of truth. In the fierceness of Reformation controversy it too largely happened that almost everything Roman was rejected *in toto*, instead of discrimination being employed to rescue the wheat from the chaff. The chief exception was the retention of the fatal doctrine of regeneration by baptism. Here more discrimination ought to have been used to reject the error while yet retaining the New Testament teaching and practice. But it would have been a mistake to have rejected baptism as completely and summarily as purgatory was rejected, for both have a basis of truth overlaid by deadly error.

vii. *A Living God* (ver. 31).

The Thessalonians turned from idols, the unreal and dead gods they had formerly feared, to serve “a God living and true” (1 Thess. 1:9). The Christian has had his conscience cleansed from dead works, to serve a living God (Heb. 9:14). He has already been warned (3:12) to take heed that an evil heart of unbelief does not induce him to turn away from the living God, because if he does so he will depart from the fountain of life and find himself in a waterless waste. And now he is still more solemnly reminded and warned that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God.” The readers are *reminded* that this is so, because knowing the Old Testament (see p. 15) they would remember the terrible occasion on which this phrase was used (2 Sam. 24:14).

David, as king, had stirred his God to anger. He acknowledged his sin, but God knew that it must be punished publicly, being a public offence. The king was allowed to choose one of three punishments. Seven years of famine; three months of defeat in war by his national foes; or three days of pestilence, a penalty to be inflicted by heavenly powers. David knew God and chose wisely and reverently, saying: “I am in a great

strait: let us now fall into the hand of Jehovah; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man.”

Even so it proved a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, even though His mercies are great, for seventy thousands of the king’s subjects died in those brief days, and David’s heart was torn and bowed, for he was a true shepherd of God’s flock.

4. *Encouragement* (10: 32—39).

When tempted to turn away from Christ to your former association with Moses let your memory work—” call to remembrance.” Think upon what you gained in Christ and reflect what you must lose apart from Him. You gained

i. *Light*. “Ye were enlightened.” You were before ignorant upon all that is most important; you walked in darkness not knowing whither you were going. But Christ justified His word that He is the light of the world, and your heart was enlightened, so that you saw, learned, knew the things of God (Eph. 5:7-14).

ii. *Endurance*. Your spirit became strong. Instead of being beaten down in the battles of life, you became victors. The Lord directed your hearts into the love of God and into the endurance of Christ (2 Thess. 3:5), so that conflict, sufferings, reproaches, afflictions left you undaunted. You carried easily burdens before insupportable.

iii. *Sympathy*. With the inflowing of the love of God in Christ your hearts were cured of selfishness and you became sympathetic, tender, thoughtful, and found grace to share gladly the burdens and trials of others, though this cost you a high price.

iv. *Heavenly Realities* became your soul’s real possessions. You knew positively that you were now owners of things permanent, treasures far, far better than the best you had held before. The higher world where Christ is, at the right hand of God, became your satisfying portion, of which none can rob you, without your consent.

v. *Freedom from Bondage to the Earth*. In consequence it mattered little to you that you were robbed of things earthly. They were rightly your own, but they were not necessary to your happiness. You could now do without them.

vi. *Joy*. Nor were you inwardly grieved at the loss, nor were you embittered against the thieves; rather you rejoiced greatly with a joy simply inexpressible. You were already sharing in the coming glory (1 Pet. 1:8. Notice the perfect participle *dedoxasmeno*, “having been glorified.”), and thus in large measure receiving already your salvation.

These entirely new and heavenly experiences were glorious, and effected a real experimental deliverance of your life from being wasted. You now lived to purpose, unto God. But all this came to you upon faith in Christ as the Son of God, appointed by God to be your all. Therefore on no account incur the heavy, irreparable loss of all this spiritual wealth by turning back to the weak and beggarly things of former days. It is in Christ alone that heavenly treasure is found; surrender Him and you lose all.

You need continual boldness in confession. Do not throw this away by ceasing to confess His name. It is sure of "great recompense of reward" (ver. 35), for such as shall at last have completed the doing' of the will of God shall receive what He has promised.

vii. *The Promise*. And what has God promised?

(1) ver. 37. He has promised us His Son as *the Coming One!* The world at large has no pleasing prospects; it is *without God and without hope* (Eph. 2:12). But the believer has a good hope through grace. Of this hope faith has taken hold (6:18): let not this grip be relaxed.

From the time when the first promise of a Deliverer was given in the Garden (Gen. 3:15) men of faith fastened their hope on that Coming One. At last Jesus came, full of grace and truth, and a much-tried heart put to Him the urgent question, "Art thou the Coming One?" (*ho erchomenos*, as in our passage).

After a brief sojourn among men He was driven away and He departed. But when going hence He left the promise "I will come again" (John 14:3), and ever since then men of faith, like those of old, have fastened on that promise, and His return has been their true, their only hope for themselves, the church, for Israel, for the world at large. Truly and sweetly did Ter Steegen sing,

A homeless stranger among us came
To this land of death and mourning;
He walked in a path of sorrow and shame,
Through insult and hate and scorning;
A man of sorrows, of toil and tears,
An outcast Man and a lonely:
But He looked on me, and through endless years
Him must I love, Him only.

And to the heart that has thus been captured by His love, and abides in it by obedience, He is henceforth the Coming One, and life becomes a pilgrimage through a desert to meet Him Whom the soul loveth and without Whom the heart cannot be content.

The title expresses the attitude of the Lord's own heart. He sits at the right hand of God in constant expectation of the day when the Father will send Him to earth again to subdue all foes and establish here the rule of God. He knows Himself to be the Coming One.

(2) ver. 37. This promise is sure of fulfillment: "the Coming One will come." Therefore "let us follow on to know the Lord; His going forth is as sure as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter rain that watereth the earth" (Hos. 6:3).

(3) ver. 37. "And He will not tarry." Yet how often do we hear the expression, We will do this or that *if the Lord tarry!* The familiarizing of the mind with an unscriptural expression is hurtful, for it obscures truth. What Scripture teaches is that the Coming One will not tarry, *not* that He may come "at any moment." This idea is wholly *contrary* to Scripture, being beyond possibility. It never has been, it never can be possible for the Coming One to come until the precise moment when the Father shall send Him and which moment He has reserved within His own authority (Acts 1:7). And that hour is definitely and repeatedly connected with the crisis when at last God's foes can be subdued under His feet.

Until that crisis has developed the Coming One cannot come, for it would not be the will of the Father; but the blessed assurance is this, that directly the hour has arrived the Lord will come and will on no account be late. There is no "tarrying" for the hour has not come; there will be no delay when the hour shall have struck: for

"God never is before His time,
And never is behind."

In the vast war of the ages the timing of concerted movements is vital.

(4) This intervening period is declared to be very brief: For yet a little, how very little" is the interval before the Coming One shall come. But the movements of each section of an army must be regulated by the calculations at Headquarters, not by those of the man in the trench. "God speaks from His own standpoint and outlook, and measures distance by His own standards, not by man's. It is for us reverently to habituate our thinking to His, not to reduce His conceptions to our measures." And to Him a thousand years is but a day, and so Moses (Deut. 32:29-35) had sung of Israel's "latter end" being "at hand" though it was three and a half millenniums distant. But God Who gave that song could have said that, from His own standpoint, the time would be three and a half days.

Love shortens time. To Jacob's infatuated heart the seven years he served for Rachel "seemed but a few days, for the love he had to her" (Gen. 29:20). Prophets and apostles, loving their Lord's appearing, thought the interval very short whatever length it

might prove to be.

(5) Yet human nature is impatient and is ready to cry with Sisera's mother, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots?" (Judges 5:28). The betrothed sighs, How can I endure till his return? The pilgrim says, Will my strength suffice to toil on through the long night? And the God of hope answers:

"My righteous one shall live by faith" (ver. 38).

Not—the one who by faith is righteous shall live; but—the one who is righteous shall live by faith. One who is living unrighteously cannot live by faith; for faith brings God into matters, and He, the Righteous One, cannot be brought into unrighteousness. Now to turn the back upon God's Son is the chief of all unrighteousness, and he who does this cannot walk by faith. But to set one's hope on Christ, as the One who came to put away sin and as the Coming One, is to act rightly, for it is to accept the promise of God, which is to walk by faith; and therefore when the Coming One shall come His coming shall be fullness of life, shall be salvation, to the one thus waiting for Him, whereas it shall be a day of darkness and death to the unbeliever, His adversary.

The Writer in ch. XI will illustrate how faith carries the pilgrim through the night.

5. *The Peril of the man of faith* (ver. 38).

i. "But if he shrink back." Who is this? Plainly "my righteous one," for no one else has been mentioned. It is the man who did walk by faith turning back to walk by sight. It is the faithful slave degenerating into the evil slave, because he thinks his lord tarries (Matt. 24:45-51). It is the forgiven slave refusing to forgive his fellow-slave (Matt. 18:32-35). It is the man of faith returning to works, so abandoning grace for law as the ground of dealing with God, giving up Christ to follow Moses, forsaking the heavenly and substantial for the earthly, the shadowy.

But what can possibly induce such folly and guilt? It is fear: "if he shrink back." There are giants in Canaan: "let us make us a captain and return into Egypt" (Num. 14:1-4). Why face the rigors of the desert? In Egypt there are leeks, onions, garlic, and all luxuries! As for the Coming One, "as for this Moses, we know not what has become of him" (Exod. 32:1); he went up into the mount, perchance he will never come back; let us institute a visible religion of our own, and try to enjoy the present. To be sure we will have priest, altar, sacrifices, a god of shining gold, a sensuous religion, and at the same time it shall be all done in the name of Jehovah; but we will have therewith carnal enjoyments instead of simplicity and austerity; and as for yonder Promised Land—let us turn the desert into this!

ii. But God says—"if he shrink back, *My soul hath no pleasure in him.*" And of those of old, redeemed and baptized, and who fed for a while on spiritual food, we

Christians are told that “with most of them *God was not well-pleased,*” the token of this being that “they were overthrown in the wilderness,” they lost their life, instead of keeping it to enjoy Canaan (1 Cor. 10:5).

6. *The Conclusion* (ver. 39). This brings the argument to a close with a combined encouragement and warning, “we are not of them that shrink back unto perdition, but of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul.”

i. “*We are of them that have faith.*” This is what characterizes us; this is the mark of the company of which we are members. Thus does the Writer again make plain to what type of person he addresses his encouragements and warnings: they are men of faith; only such can profit by the promises; it is such who need the warnings.

Again the terms employed need careful consideration free from the beclouding influence of prepossessions; for it must be admitted that the renderings “perdition” and “the saving of the soul” suit well the doctrine that the truly saved can be finally lost; nor can those of the opposite belief counter this save by the plainly unfounded assertion that saved persons are not in view. The terms employed, however, admit of more exact renderings requiring neither of these views.

ii. *Saving the soul.* The noun *peripoiesis* (saving) and its verb *peripoieo* mean to cause something to remain over and above, and so to preserve it, reserve it for oneself, acquire it for one’s own. Thus deacons can serve the church so well as *to acquire* for themselves a good degree (1 Tim. 3:13); and thus Christ *acquired* the church at the price of His own blood (Acts 20:28), thus *preserving* its members from the coming destruction and reserving them as a *private possession* (1 Pet. 2:9). To this end He has sealed them, with a view to the day when He will *take open possession* (Eph. 1:14). Therefore God has not appointed these unto wrath but to be *preserved* unto salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:9), for He has called us unto *the obtaining* of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:14).

Except for our present passage (Heb. 10:39) the only other place in the New Testament is Luke 17:33, which is of special importance in our inquiry because it has both of the words *peripoieo* and *psuche* even as Heb. 10:39 has *peripoiesis* and *psuche*. Also the one has *apoleia* and Luke 17:33 has *apollumi*.

This Greek word *psuche* has the meaning of both “soul” and “life” according to the context in each place. The meaning in Luke is plainly “life,” for it follows directly a reference to Lot’s wife losing her life by a sudden judgment. She shrank back from the empty prospect suddenly set before Lot and herself and turned back in heart to Sodom, though she knew it was under the wrath of God. The words of the Lord therefore declare that, if any one seeks *to reserve* his life for himself he shall lose it, but if any one loses it for Christ’s sake he shall bring it forth alive (the proper force of *zoogoneo*) out of any and every danger and loss, even as Lot preserved his life, though he lost everything

but his life.

Obviously this agrees exactly with the warnings already considered that believers may be cut short by premature death and thus lose their life. It will therefore harmonize with the Lord's words should our passage be rendered, "we are of them who have faith unto the *keeping safe of life*."

Christians too generally neglect such teaching by our Lord though He laid heavy emphasis upon it. He had before declared that "the one finding his life shall lose (*apolesai*) it, and the one losing (*apolesas*) his life on my account shall find it" (Matt. 10:39). And later He emphasized and enlarged this instruction by assuring the apostles that "whoever may wish (*thelo*) to save his life shall *lose* it; but whoever may *lose* his life on My account shall find it. For what shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?" (Matt. 16:25, 26). Then follows the instruction that this profit and loss account will be closed when the Son of Man shall return in glory and "render to every man according to his doing." This makes clear that it is children of God to whom this teaching is given, for it is only such who will be rewarded at the time when Christ comes in glory. The unregenerate who will have died will not be judged until after the Millennial age, at the great white throne.

It is evident that *psuche* in this passage must mean "life," if for no other reason than that no man can exchange his *soul* for something else; because the soul is the person, the ego, and no one can give up his personality, himself, in exchange for another object. It is impossible. But a man *can* spend the powers, means, opportunities, time which make up *life*, upon unworthy and unprofitable objects. He can exchange his life for pleasure, vice, wealth, power, and can thus gain the world, to find at the end of life that he gained naught but lost all.

A renowned Lord Chancellor did not turn to God until about eighty years of age. When someone felicitated him upon the salvation of his soul he made the acute and searching reply, "Yes, my soul is saved, but my *life* is lost." Not one hour of the long past could he recover to spend it for Christ and eternity. Likewise may one-converted young decline the cross, live for the world, and so waste his life and lose it.

This use of *peripoi6* by Christ gives its dominant sense, as is shown by its usage in the Greek Old Testament, as in these places:

- (1) Gen. 12:12. Abraham said to Sarah: "they will kill me, and *save thee alive*."
- (2) Num. 22:33. The angel said to Balaam about the ass, unless she had turned aside from me, surely now I had even slain thee, and *saved her alive*."
- (3) 1 Sam. 15:9. "Saul and the people *spared* Agag, and the best of the sheep, etc.," but everything else they utterly destroyed; that is, Agag was left alive.
- (4) 1 Kings 18:5. Ahab said to Obadiah: "peradventure we may find grass and

- save the horses and mules *alive*, that we lose not all the beasts.”
- (5) Ps. 79:11. Thus also the prayer: “*preserve* thou those that are appointed to death”—that is, keep them alive.
- (6) Isa. 31:5. So of Zion in the day of the Lord, God has promised: “As birds flying so will Jehovah of hosts protect Jerusalem and will rescue and *preserve* and save.”

By taking our passage according to this major use of the word *peripoiesis* no question arises of final salvation or damnation, but the former warning against wasting one’s life is enforced, with the consequent possible punishment of one’s life being cut short in judgment and what further temporary penalty may follow upon this.

iii. *Perdition*. The noun *apoleia* is found eighteen times in the New Testament and certainly in several of these refers to eternal destruction. Judas is a “son of perdition” (John 17:12), as also the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3), who at his end “goeth into perdition” (Rev. 17:8, 11). Rev. 20:10 says that his torment is to be “for ever and ever,” which shows that perdition for him is to be endless.

In 2 Peter the word is used five times (2:1 twice; 2:3; 3:7, 16), and points to the final destruction of the ungodly when the heavens and the earth are destroyed by fire. In Rom. 9:22; Phil 1:28; 3:19; 1 Tim. 6:9 the same meaning may be accepted.

But Peter’s words to Simon (Acts 8:20) translated “Thy money *perish* with thee” seem not so definitely to declare Simon’s eternal ruin as the English suggests to most readers. The Greek perhaps goes no further than a warning to Simon of what the final outcome may be unless he repents and gains forgiveness.

The student will ponder the use of the optative *eie* with the accusative *eis*, which suggests rather a movement which may end in destruction than a certainty of this. If the latter had been the meaning there could have been no question of repentance and pardon. The common force of the optative to express a wish creates difficulty here, for would an apostle wish a man to perish seeing that God wishes that all should be saved? (1 Tim.2: 4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

A friend writes: “Peter does not say, ‘May you go to destruction with your money,’ which certainly would imply a desire for Simon’s destruction. He says, ‘May your money go to destruction with you’—meaning, I suggest, ‘May your money go to destruction (lit. ‘be unto destruction’) as you yourself are now going.’ Indeed, the suggestion may be, that if Simon’s money did go to destruction, he himself on the other hand, might be rescued from this course along the broad road that leads to destruction.” On Peter’s words the *Speaker’s Commentary* says: “understood by the fathers generally as conveying a prediction, not an imprecation—Simon was urged to repentance and prayer.” (See Zahn *in loco* for a sober discussion.)

It is evident that such words as life, death, loss, destruction and the like do not in themselves indicate the duration of the states they describe. This must be shown by some added word or by the context or another passage. Thus the Lord spoke of a “broad way that leads to *destruction*,” in contrast to a “narrow way that leads to life” (Matt. 7:13, 14). The ultimate end of that broad way, for those who pursue it to the end must be final perdition. Yet the Lord did not here say this, though in this same Gospel He is reported as having twice spoken of eternal fire (Matt. 18:8; 25:41) and once of eternal punishment and once of eternal life (25:46). Here He omits “eternal”: Why?

Was not David on the broad way, which the many follow, during the months when he walked in deliberate sin and refused to repent? One does not so act on the narrow way. But since it is the case that a regenerate man cannot finally be lost there must be some lesser sense in which such a one can experience “destruction.” Nor is this sense far to seek, for the word *apoleia* has also the definite meaning of a thing being lost and wasted: “to what purpose was this *waste*” of the ointment? asked Judas (Matt. 26:8; Mark 14:4).

Perhaps this would be enough force to give to Peter’s words to Simon seeing that he left open the possibility of repentance and so did not denounce against him irretrievable rum, though the awful possibility lay in the background. And if this restricted sense be given to the words of the Lord quoted they would cover such a case as that of David, where there is obvious risk of life being wasted in the sense and to the degree above shown.

This is indeed the primary sense of the word *apoleia* and it is quite frequent in the case of the verb *apollumi* from which the noun is derived. It is used of *lost* sheep (Luke 15:4, etc.), *lost* money (Luke 15:8), *lost* reward (Matt. 10:42), etc. We read of the *perishing* of wisdom, garments, flowers, wineskins, and members of the body. Out of nearly ninety places it is used only eleven times where final perdition seems clearly meant (Matt. 18:14; Jn. 3:16; 17:12; 19:9; Rom. 2:12; 1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; 2 Thess. 2:10; Jas. 4:12; 2 Pet. 3:9; and most emphatically 1 Cor. 15:18, that, if there be no resurrection, the dead are *perished*). But it is used some thirty-three times (about one-third of all places) of the death of the body, and ten times of the loss of the *life* in the sense above considered.

It is this last sense that best suits our present passage (Heb. 10:39) if the keeping safe of the *life* is the true meaning. For the way to do this is to use life well and worthily, and therefore the opposite will be to waste and lose it, as they do who shrink back from the path of faith, the narrow way which few find, and not all who find follow to the end of their earthly course.

Let every Christian so walk as to show that he is indeed of that company who can truly say, “we are not of them who shrink back . . . but of them who have faith,” who walk not by self-efforts to be justified by the law, but by faith, faith which is placed in the

Son of God, Who loved us and gave Himself up for us (Gal. 2:19, 20).

Note A (pp. 15, 73, 176). ETERNAL SECURITY.

The strength of the case for the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer is not always realized, and some of its grounds are not understood by all.

1. *Justification.* ‘This security is involved in the nature of the justifying act of God. To justify is the act of a judge when he declares that, having examined the charge brought against the accused, he finds him not guilty before the law. The ground upon which God declares righteous the sinner who puts faith in Christ is that Christ as his Surety satisfied the demands of the law against the sinner. The atoning death of Christ which satisfied the demands of the law is imputed to, or put to the credit of, the sinner who puts his reliance upon the Surety as having suffered on his behalf the highest penalty imposed by the law. The actual offender is reckoned in Divine law to have expiated his offences by having died for them, because his Substitute died for them. I through the law died unto [out of reach of] the law. . . . I have been crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:19). See *Note* at end.

The question, therefore, as it concerns the sinner, is, for *how many* of his sins did Christ by His death accept responsibility and render satisfaction therefor? If it was for those sins only which he had committed up to the time when he first placed his faith on Christ and was justified by that faith, then, as to his future from that hour, one of two features must characterize it, namely, either he must never sin again, or, if he sin even once, then he must suffer eternal death, since, in the case supposed, Christ did not bear these post-conversion sins and no atonement can ever avail in respect thereof, for Christ will not die again (Rom. 6:9, 10; Heb. 7:16).

In other words: in the case now postulated, sin after conversion must inevitably cancel salvation for most believers (an exception may be supposed possible in a case where death occurs immediately after conversion). For all these Christ might as well not have died for their preconversion sins because they will be eternally lost for their post-conversion sins.

As regards men who died before Christ died, and who had looked forward by faith to the coming Redeemer, *all* their sins of their whole life were past when he died for them. As regards men who were alive when Christ died, some of their sins were past and some were future. As regards those born since He died, and who have believed on Him, *all* their sins of their whole life were future when He died. By what process or to what purpose could a division have been made by Divine counsel and the Surety have been made responsible for a part only of their sins? In all of these cases if He did not accept and discharge the full legal penalty for *all* their sins then He did not provide salvation for any one: the whole stupendous transaction would be void and valueless. But inasmuch as He did in fact satisfy the law of God in respect of the sins of the whole

life of the one who relies on Him, therefore the acquittal by the Judge of all the earth, that is to say, His declaration that the accused is not guilty before the law, sets him free from the eternal penalty due to the sins of his whole life.

Further, it is deeply important that (according, e.g. to the law of England) when a person has been tried for a crime and acquitted he cannot be again tried for the same offence or offences. Fifty years ago there was a barrister famed for his success in defending criminals. He relates that on one occasion he secured the acquittal of a man charged with murder, and afterwards did not cease to be sorry, for the culprit boasted, that, though his lawyer got him off, his was the hand that did the crime. Yet the man was secure from the law as regards that offence because he had been tried and (wrongly) declared not guilty.

In like manner Christ declared that the one who believes God's message of salvation "cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). For him the door of the condemned cell has been opened and he has stepped out into life and liberty. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Who shall impeach again God's chosen ones, seeing that God Himself has declared them to be righteous in law? (Rom. 8:33). So long as the work of the cross retains its virtue before God, so long will the righteousness imputed to the believer stand, that is, both are eternal.

2. *Temporal Penalties for the Justified.* Here enters the vast importance of the truth before urged, that the work of the cross delivers the believer from the *eternal* penalty of sin but not from any *temporal* punishments which may attach under the disciplinary government of the universe by God. And these may prove severe and prolonged, though not eternal in the case of the justified. Various scriptures present this serious and balancing aspect. For example:

(1) There is the private realm of the *father* and his *family*, wherein the father chastises the children. This will be considered when we reach ch. xii of our Epistle. It is a manifestly different case from that of a criminal before a Court on trial for his life.

(2) There is the case of a *king* and *his own household*. It is set forth in our Lord's parables in Luke 19:11-17 and Matt. 25:14-30. The unfaithful servant was deprived of further service and prospects and was cast out of the house into the darkness of the night during the temporary festivities connected with the king's return. He might even be severely scourged (Luke 12:41-48). But these penalties were not the capital punishment inflicted upon the king's *enemies*. That is stated in immediate contrast: "Howbeit these mine *enemies*, who would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and *slay them* before me" (Luke 19:27).

(3) There is the parallel instance in Matt. 18:21-35 of the servant who refused mercy to his fellow servant though himself had received mercy from their lord. In this

case the master revoked his mercy and the remission of the debt, and commanded that the latter be exacted. If this be applied to the unregenerate and eternity it will mean that the sinner can ultimately “pay all that is due” by his own sufferings; a way of salvation repugnant to Scripture and which would render needless the sufferings of the Redeemer. But it is evident that this measure taken by the lord operated within the same restricted sphere of his personal household. The teaching was an answer to the inquiry as to how often a *brother* ought to forgive a *brother* (ver. 21), and the application which Christ made of the instruction carries the same limit of the father and the family: “So shall also My heavenly *Father* do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his *brother* from your hearts” (ver. 35).

None of such cases raises the matter of the legal status of the children or the family servants before the *criminal courts*. This status remained unaffected by the disciplinary dealings of the father or the retributive measures of the master. Christ gave no challenge to His own statement that the believer passes out of death into life and will not come into judgment as to *that* question (John 5:24). None of these servants lost his life by his carnality.

3. *Types and Histories.* Types and histories made these truths clear in the Old Testament.

(1) The bringing of the appointed sin offering secured forgiveness: “and they for he] shall be forgiven” (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35). He who came repentant to the altar, where was offered the atoning lamb, “went down to his house justified” (Luke 18:14). From chs. ix and x of our Epistle we have seen that that older justification was a foretaste of the perfect and eternal justification secured by Christ’s eternal redemption.

(2) But more. The bringing of a burnt offering in due form secured more than bare forgiveness, even the *acceptance* of the *offerer himself*: that *he* may be *accepted* before Jehovah” (Lev. 1:3). His *status* was assured in the presence of God, “before Jehovah.” Granted that this was imperfect under the old covenant, yet it was *real* as far as it went, and it was typical of the perfect and eternal status acquired in Christ, “through Whom also we have had our access into this grace [this state of favour] wherein we stand” (Rom. 5:2).

(3) From 1 Cor. 5:7, “For our Passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ,” it is plain that the passover in Egypt was typical of Christ and His atoning blood. In Egypt the Israelites, equally with the Egyptians, were under the sentence of death against sin. The sprinkled blood delivered from that status as men condemned all who sheltered there-under, and set them free, through their baptism in the Red Sea into union with Moses (1 Cor. 10:1, 2, to escape from the land of doom itself and to enter in the desert the pathway of faith in God. There they were constituted a people, the people of Jehovah, a new status effected by redemption and faith.

Yet the more part of them did not live in conformity with this new standing and relationship and were overthrown in the desert. Their faith broke down, and so “the Lord, having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not” (Jude 5). They forfeited bodily life and lost their prospects in the promised land, but God took care that *not a single one of them got back to Egypt*. Not even though they set their faces to return there (Num. 14:3, 4). They died in the wilderness (Num. 14:32; 1 Cor. 10:5). If even one of them had reached Egypt the type would have allowed that a redeemed person may get back to his original lost status; but the type inflexibly disallows this. To this same effect is the Divine review of that period given in Isa. 63, especially verses 9-14. They are described as His people, loved and redeemed, even though on account of their sins He had to fight against them.

(4) On the other hand, the types and histories show how severe may be the penalties of unbelief and disobedience, short of a resumption of the original alienation and unrelieved condemnation of men before God. This has been sufficiently illustrated in the present treatise.

4. Eternal Life. The same conclusion is involved in the fact that the life infused into the believer by the new birth is *eternal* life; that is, it is not a created life, having beginning and capable of having end, but it is a sharing in the uncreated life of God Himself, the Eternal: “for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should *not perish* but have *eternal* life” (John 3:16). Thus the giving of this life secures that the recipient shall not perish, even as Christ said later of His sheep, “they shall never perish” (John 10:28).

For even if the sheep wander from the fold, and must suffer much distress in the desert, yet the Good Shepherd will “go after that which is lost *until He find it*” (Luke 15:4). The ultimate restoration of the backslidden believer is certain, even though his penalties be not suffered or his recovery be not accomplished in this life; for can it be doubted that many backslidden believers die without having been healed of their backsliding? Such must, therefore, either be eternally lost (in which case the doctrine we are controverting must after all prove true), or their recovery must be effected after death, which implies that the Father’s disciplinary dealings for their recovery are applied after death.

The chief statement on the subject needs, and will bear, strict examination. Christ said (John 10:27-30):

- (1) My sheep hear My voice, and (2) I know them, and (3) they follow Me: and (4) I give unto them eternal life; and (5) they shall never perish, and (6) no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father (7) Who hath given them unto Me, (8) is greater than all, and (9) no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. (10) I and My Father are one.

It is difficult to conceive of any words more capable of creating the impression that the sheep of Christ are eternally secure from perishing. They create the impression that the Speaker deliberately designed to create that impression, that it was indeed His precise intention. But it may be urged that this is true only of the true sheep of Christ, and that one mark of these is that they know and hearken to the voice of the Shepherd and follow Him. What if one of them ceases to hearken and to follow? Does he not thereby cease to be one of Christ's sheep? And must not then his security from perishing lapse?

Let this be tested in a case that can be seen too often. A sinner turns in faith unto Christ, and manifests the true tokens of being one of His sheep, by continuing for, say, twenty years to hearken and to follow. Then, alas, he wanders from the fold and the Shepherd, and so ceases to exhibit the characteristics of Christ's sheep. So now (if the argument in question is right) he does *not* possess the eternal life and *shall* perish. It thus becomes evident that the life which he had during those twenty years was not in fact eternal, for it has ended so far as he is concerned, nor was he ever secure from perishing, for at last he is to perish. In his case the magnificent assurances given by Christ were without value, nor had this person at any time any real right to comfort himself by them, seeing that ultimately they will be unfulfilled in his case. So that during those twenty years *he had* eternal life, for Christ stated this of His sheep: yet his perishing at last will show that the life he then had was *not* eternal. He was a sheep of Christ, because for long years he exhibited the true characteristics of a sheep: yet he was *not* a sheep of Christ, because finally he shall perish. This *reductio ad absurdum* shows that the reasoning examined is false.

But let the Good Shepherd Himself solve this problem by the parable before quoted from Luke 15:3-7. It states the exact case above supposed. A man has a hundred sheep. One of them wanders. Does it thereby cease to be a sheep? Or cease to be the property of the Owner? Nay, rather; when the Owner has recovered it does He not cry with joy "I have found *My sheep* which was lost"? Even while it was lost it was still a *sheep* and it was still *His*, and He secured its restoration and safety.

It is to be noted that the teaching in Luke 15 applies properly to backsliders, not to the unregenerate, however suitably its lessons may be extended to such. The sheep had been in the fold; the coin had been in the possession of the woman; the prodigal was the son of the father; and each was *restored* to its proper status, not set there for the first time.

5. *Freely*. One further consideration will suffice to establish our conclusion. Of justification it is stated that the believer is "justified *freely (dorean)* by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24); and of eternal life it is said that, while the "wages of sin is death . . . the *free gift (charisma)* of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). The righteousness and justification granted to the believer in Christ are likewise described by the same word: "the free gift (*charisma*) came of

many offences unto justification” (Rom. 5:16, 17).

Now every gift carries at least one condition precedent to its taking effect, namely, that it must be accepted; but having been accepted i. free gift is necessarily free of conditions subsequent (such as, for example, the conduct of the receiver after reception of the gift), or it would be a conditional gift, not a free gift. This is not said of any other gift of God save justification and eternal life. The righteousness of this arises from the entire and eternal sufficiency of the redemption price which provides these gifts. Therefore the minimum indispensable to salvation, even justification and eternal life, is granted to the receiver absolutely, whereas gifts to the saved are conditional upon conduct. Because the unregenerate *cannot* work his urgent need is met by a free gift at the expense of the Giver: because, by the grace of the Spirit, the regenerate *can* do good works he is required to do them as the condition of further benefits. Both the Divine love and the Divine morality demand this. The free gift is unforfeitable, and cannot be withdrawn by the Giver; later gifts are forfeitable and must be “made sure” by diligence (2 Pet. 1:10).

It was Rom. 3:24, “being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” which helped much to lift Bunyan out of the Slough of Despond, to set his feet upon the rock Assurance, and to put a new song into his mouth, even praise unto our God. Of that text he says sweetly the words quoted before (p. 164):

Now was I as one awaked out of some troublesome sleep and dream, and listening to this heavenly sentence, I was as if I heard it thus expounded to me: Sinner, thou thinkest that because of thy Sins and Infirmities I cannot save thy soul; but behold my Son is by me, and upon him I look, and not on thee, and deal with thee according as I am pleased with him. (*Grace Abounding*, para. 258.)

Noble and arresting is his account of an earlier experience:

But one day, as I was passing in the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul. *Thy righteousness is in heaven;* and me thought withal, I saw, with the Eyes of my Soul, Jesus Christ at God’s right hand. There, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was a-doing, God could not say of me, He wants [*i.e.* lacks] Righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my Righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, *the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.* (*Ibid.* para. 229.)

Happy indeed is he who, as touching his status as righteous before God, sees Christ to be his *all*, for thus will he be assured that his judicial acceptance by God is necessarily as eternal as the righteousness of his Surety.

Note B (p. 177). The word *timoria* has principally the sense of *penal* infliction, as by sentence of a judge, as distinct from *paideia*, *parental* discipline, as in ch. 12:5-11. The former looks more to the vindication of righteousness by law, whether the offender be reclaimed or not; the latter has the moral profit of the child as its more prominent thought. In this point *paideia* is nearer to *kolasis* than to *timoria*. But even as in later Greek the distinction between these latter words was fading (see, e.g. Chrysostom in Alford's second quotation on 2 Thess. 2:2), so in Biblical Greek *timoria* included the thought of the reclamation of the offender. It is so used in the Septuagint at Jer. 21 (31:21 in Eng. Ver.), where Sion is bidden to execute *vengeance* in connection with her repentance and return to God. Still more distinctly at Ezek. 5:17 and 14:15 *timoria* is used of the fierceness of the wrath of God upon Israel and its land as executed by Nebuchadnezzar. Yet it is clear from Lev. 26:40-45 that all of God's inflictions upon that people are designed for their humbling, repentance, and ultimate restoration; which end was served of old by the Babylonian captivity, for such of Israel as returned to the land did so cured of idolatry and so far purified by the terrible *timoria*. This end will be fully served by the yet fiercer and closing wrath upon Israel, to be executed by Antichrist at the end of this age, as the passage in Leviticus foretells.

Therefore the thought of ultimate moral benefit is not to be excluded from *timoria* in Heb. 10:29. It can include this as well as the vindicating of the law of God in the punishing of His people who apostatize.

Note C. ON ANCIENT ROMAN LAW.

In his *Introduction to Roman Law* (p. 143 of the 1921 edition by A. F. Munson) W. A. Hunter wrote on Extinction of Contracts as follows:

- i. *Solutio*. The giving of what is due may discharge every obligation, or, if the creditor consents, have something else in its place. It matters not who discharges it, whether the debtor or someone else for him; for he is freed even if someone else discharges it, and that whether the debtor knew it or not, and even if it was done against his will.

This statement of Roman Law, which ruled in the world in New Testament times, is worthy of detailed comparison or contrast with the Divine Law declared in the Word of God.

The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Practical Treatise for Plain and Serious Readers
(Chapter 13) by G. H. Lang.

First Printing, The Paternoster Press, 1951
Second Printing, Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc., 1985

Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc.
P.O. Box 1246
Hayesville, NC 28904
(706) 896-3333

Special permission has been granted to InTheBeginning.org by Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc. to copy this chapter from The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Practical Treatise for Plain and Serious Readers by G. H. Lang.

These pages may NOT be reproduced or altered for any pecuniary or publishing purposes without expressed permission from the publishing company.

Original document was scanned with an [Epson 636 Expression scanner](#) using [TextBridge Pro98](#) software as the interface to [WORD97](#).

Hebrews redirects here. This article is about the epistle. You may be looking for the people group. Back to the Epistle to Philemon | List of Books | Forward to the Epistle of James The Epistle to the Hebrews is one of the General epistles. The Epistle to the Hebrews is the twentieth book of the New Testament and the fifty-eighth book of Bible. It is a homily written to Jews who became believers in Christ to show Jesus' superiority over the Old Testament sacrificial system and religion. The book is an Hebrews, epistle to the. The longest of the non-Pauline letters in the NT. Traditionally it follows the thirteen Pauline letters; in the great uncials it comes between Paul's nine letters to churches and his four to individuals; in P46, the oldest MS of the corpus Paulinum (end of 2nd cent.), it comes second among the letters to churches, next after Romans. The difficulty felt by the Rom. church was largely due to the tradition by which canonical authority and apostolic authorship went hand in hand.