

He will burn up the *chaff* with unquenchable fire!

J.C. Ryle, 1878

"He will gather His wheat into the barn — but *He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire!*" Matthew 3:12

This text describes in words, that which should make our ears tingle — Christ shall "burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire!"

When the Lord Jesus Christ comes to *purge* His threshing floor — He shall *punish* all who are not His disciples with a fearful punishment. All who are found impenitent and unbelieving — all who have held the truth in unrighteousness — all who have clung to sin, stuck to the world, and set their affection on things below — all who are without Christ. All such shall come to an awful end! Christ shall "burn up the chaff!"

Their punishment shall be *most SEVERE*. There is no pain like that of *burning*. Put your finger in the candle flame for a moment, if you doubt this, and try. Fire is the most *destructive* and *devouring* of all elements. Look into the mouth of a blast furnace — and think what it would be to be there. Fire is of all elements most opposed to life. Creatures can live in air, and earth, and water — but nothing can live in fire! Yet fire is the portion to which the Christless and unbelieving will come. Christ will "burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire!"

Their punishment shall be *ETERNAL*. Millions of ages shall pass away, and the fire into which the chaff is cast, shall still *burn on*. That fire shall never burn low and become dim. The *fuel* of that fire shall never waste away and be consumed. It is "unquenchable fire."

Oh, reader, these are sad and painful things to speak of! I have no pleasure in dwelling on them. I could rather say with the apostle Paul, "I have great sorrow." But they are things written for our learning, and it is good to consider them. They are a part of that Scripture which is all profitable, and they ought to be heard. As painful as the subject of *Hell* is — it is one about which I dare not, cannot, must not be silent. Who would desire to speak of Hell-fire — if God had not spoken of it? When God has spoken of it so plainly — who can safely hold his peace?

I dare not shut my eyes to the fact, that a deep-rooted infidelity lurks in men's minds on the subject of Hell. I see it oozing out in the utter *apathy* of some — they eat, and drink, and sleep — as if there was no wrath to come! I see it creeping forth in the coldness of others about their neighbors' souls — they show little concern to pluck *brands* from the fire. I desire to denounce such infidelity with all my might. Believing that there are *terrors of the Lord*, as well as the recompense of reward — I call upon all who profess to believe the Bible, to be on their guard.

I know that some do not believe there is any Hell at all. They think it impossible there can be such a place. They call it inconsistent with the mercy of God. They say it is too dreadful an idea to be really true. The devil of course rejoices in the views of such people. They help his kingdom mightily. They are preaching up his favorite old doctrine, "*You shall not surely die!*"

I know furthermore, that some do not believe that Hell is *eternal*. They tell us it is incredible that a compassionate God will punish men *forever*. He will surely open the prison-doors at last. This also is a mighty help to the devil's cause. "Take your ease," he whispers to sinners — "if you do make a mistake, never mind, it is *not* forever."

I know also that some believe that there is a Hell — but never allow that anybody is going there! All people with them are 'good' as soon as they die — all were *sincere* — all *meant well* — and all, they hope, got to Heaven. Alas, what a *common delusion* is this! I can well understand the feeling of the little girl who asked her mother where all the *wicked* people were buried, "for she found no mention on the gravestones of any except the good."

And I know very well that some believe there is a Hell — but never like it to be spoken of. It is a subject that should always be kept back. They see no profit in bringing it forward, and are rather shocked when it is mentioned. This also is an immense help to the devil. "Hush, hush!" says Satan, "say nothing about Hell." The fowler wishes to hear no noise when he lays his *snare*. The wolf would like the shepherd to *sleep* while he prowls round the fold. Just so, the devil rejoices when Christians are *silent* about Hell.

Reader, all these notions are the *opinions of man*. What is it to you and I — what *man* thinks in religion? Man will not judge us at the last day. Man's *fancies* and *traditions* are not to be our guide in this life. There is but one point to be settled — "What says the Word of God?"

Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, ***Hell is real and true***. It is as true as Heaven — as true as justification by faith — as true as the fact that Christ died upon the cross. There is not a fact or doctrine which you may not lawfully doubt — if you doubt Hell. Disbelieve Hell — and you unscrew, unsettle, and unpin everything in Scripture! You may as well throw your Bible away at once. From "no Hell" to "no God" there is but a series of *steps*.

Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, ***Hell will have inhabitants***. The wicked shall certainly be turned into Hell, and all the people that forget God. These shall go away into *everlasting punishment*. The same blessed Savior who now sits on a throne of *grace*, will one day sit on a throne of *judgment* — and men will see there is such a thing as "the wrath of the Lamb!" The same lips which now say "Come — come unto Me," will one day say "Depart from Me, you who are cursed!" Alas, how awful the thought of being condemned by Christ Himself — judged by the Savior; sentenced to eternally misery — by the Lamb!

Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, ***Hell will be intense and unutterable woe***. It is vain to talk of all the expressions about being only *figures of speech*. The pit, the prison, the worm, the fire, the thirst, the blackness, the darkness, the weeping, the gnashing of teeth, the second death — all these may be figures of speech if you please. But Bible figures *mean something*, beyond all question — and here they mean something which man's mind can never fully conceive. Oh, reader, the *miseries* of mind and conscience, are far worse than those of the body! The whole extent of Hell, the present suffering, the bitter recollection of the past, the hopeless prospect of the future — will never be thoroughly known, except by those who go there!

Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, ***Hell is eternal***. It must be eternal, or words have no meaning at all. Forever and ever; everlasting; unquenchable; never-dying — all these are expressions used about Hell, and expressions that cannot be *explained away*. It must be eternal, or the very foundations of Heaven are cast down. If Hell has an end — then Heaven has an end too. They both stand or fall together. It must be, or else every doctrine of the Gospel is undermined. If a man may escape Hell at length without faith in Christ, or sanctification of the Spirit — then sin is no longer an infinite evil, and there was no such great need for Christ making an atonement.

And where is there warrant for saying that Hell can ever change a heart, or make it fit for Heaven? Hell must be eternal, or Hell would cease to be Hell altogether. Give a man *hope* — and he will bear anything. Grant a hope of deliverance, however distant — and Hell is but a drop of water. Ah, reader, these are solemn things!

FOREVER is the most solemn word in the Bible! Alas, for that *day* which shall have no tomorrow! That day when men shall seek death, and not find it, and shall desire to die — but death shall flee from them! Who shall dwell with devouring fire! Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings!

Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, ***Hell is a subject that ought not to be kept back***. It is striking to observe the many texts about it in Scripture. It is striking to observe that none say so much about it as our Lord Jesus Christ, that gracious and merciful Savior; and the apostle John, whose heart seems full of love. Truly it may well be doubted whether we ministers speak of it as much as we ought. I cannot forget the words of a dying hearer of Mr. Newton's — "Sir, you often told me of Christ and salvation; why did you not oftener remind me of Hell and danger?"

Let others be silent about Hell if they will — I dare not do so. I see it plainly in Scripture, and I must speak of it. I fear that thousands are on that *broad way* that leads to it, and I would sincerely arouse them to a sense of the *peril* before them. What would you say of the man who saw his neighbor's house in danger of being burnt down — and never raised the cry of "Fire!" What ought to be said of us as ministers, if we call ourselves watchmen for souls, and yet see the fires of Hell raging in the distance — and never give the alarm? Call it *bad taste*, if you like, to speak of Hell. Call it *charity* to make things pleasant, and speak smoothly, and soothe men with constant lullaby of peace. From such notions of *taste* and *charity* — may I ever be delivered! My notion of *charity* is to warn men plainly of danger! My notion of *taste* in the ministerial office, is to declare all the counsel of God. If I never spoke of Hell — I would think I had kept back something that was profitable — and would look on myself as *an accomplice of the devil*.

Reader, I beseech you, in all tender affection, beware of false views of the subject on which I have been dwelling. Beware of new and strange doctrines about Hell and the *eternity* of punishment. Beware of *manufacturing a God* of your own: a God who is all mercy — but not just; a God who is all love — but not holy; a God who has a

Heaven for everybody — but a Hell for none; a God who can allow good and evil to be side by side in time — but will make no *distinction* between good and evil in eternity. Such a God is an *idol of your own imagination!* It is as true an *idol* as any snake or crocodile in an Egyptian temple — as true an idol as was ever molded out of brass or clay! The hands of your own *imagination* and *sentimentality* have made him. He is not the God of the Bible — and beside the God of the Bible — there is no God at all. Your *Heaven* would be no Heaven at all. A Heaven containing all sorts of sinful people, would be miserable discord indeed. Alas, for the *eternity* of such a Heaven! There would be little difference between it and Hell! Ah, reader, there is a Hell! There is a *fire* for the chaff! Take heed, lest you find it out to your cost too late!

Beware of being wise above that which is written. Beware of forming fanciful theories of your own, and then trying to make the Bible square with them. Beware of making selections from your Bible to suit your taste — refusing, like a spoiled child, whatever you think bitter — seizing, like a spoiled child, whatever you think sweet. What is all this but taking *Jehoiakim's penknife*? What does it amount to but telling God, that you, a poor short-lived worm — know better than He? It will not do! It will not do. You must take the Bible as it is. You must read it all, and believe it all. You must come to the reading of it in the spirit of a little child. Dare not to say, "I believe *this* verse, for I like it. I reject *that*, for I do not like it. I receive *this*, for I can agree with it. I refuse *that*, for I cannot reconcile it with my views." Nay! but O man, who are you that replies against God? By what right do you talk in this way? Surely it were better to say over every chapter in the Word, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!" Ah, reader, if men would do this, they would never deny *Hell*, the *chaff*, and the *fire*!