

Pastor Russell's Sermon

PURGATORY FIRES! NOT NOW BUT SOON

Pastor Russell Interprets the Word of God.

PURGATORY OF THE BIBLE

Trials and Chastisements Are the Lord's Plan For Dealing With Mankind For Its Good—The Saintly of the Present Are Few, Yet All Must Become Holy Before Achieving Everlasting Life—The Wicked Will Be Destroyed in Second Death If Not Purified in Bible's Purgatory.



Indianapolis, October 27.—The world-renowned Pastor Russell is here. We report one of his discourses from the text, "Some men's sins go before hand to judgment, and some they follow after." (1 Thess. v. 24.) He said:

Gradually, as the eyes of our understanding open to the true beauties of God's Word, we find that the gross errors of the past have, indeed, some foundation in the truth. Yet the two are so different that they might pass each other without recognition.

As Bible students are allowing the Word of God to interpret itself they are being blessed; their faith is being strengthened as they find that the real teachings of the Bible are beautiful and harmonious and God-honoring and acceptable to sanctified common sense. As so much of our confusion has been connected with the subject of future punishment, it is only reasonable that much of our blessing and enlightenment should come from a better understanding of the Scriptures bearing upon this subject. Our first lesson to learn was the difference between the Bible Hell and the tortuous torture chambers of our bewildered forefathers, who had not the Bible in their possession and who, if they had possessed it, lacked generally the education necessary to read it.

When we found that the Hebrew word Sheol is the only word translated *hell* during the Old Testament period of four thousand years, we were not surprised. But when we found that that word signifies the *tomb, the death state*, and that it is translated *grave* in our Common Version Bible more times than it is translated *hell*, we were surprised. And when further close investigation showed that the good, as well as the bad, go to Sheol, and that the Bible declares that all who go to Sheol were redeemed by Christ's death, and that eventually He will destroy Sheol and deliver all the prisoners of death from Sheol—then we began to see what a serious blunder had been made in the translation.

But when about to blame the translators for deceiving us, we found that the trouble lay rather with a change in the use of language. All know that all living languages are gradually changing. And investigation shows that in old English the word *hell* was used as a synonym for *hole* or *pit*, or something covered over, as the grave. Thus an English farmer in olden times might say, "We belied (hatched) our hundred bushels of potatoes this fall"; or, "We belied (hatched) our cottage."

The fault was not so much with the translators as with the wrong idea already firmly imbedded in the human mind—not the teaching of the Bible—that God intends to punish in purgatory or eternal torture all except the saintly few. From the first Satan seems to have endeavored to deceive humanity respecting the true character of the Creator; and his success is shown by the warped and twisted interpretations that we all gave to our Heavenly Father's Word.

Sheol Sometimes Used Figuratively. In probably three or four texts out of seventy the Hebrew word Sheol and its Greek equivalent Hades are used figuratively, as, for instance, St. Paul refers to Hades, the tomb, under the figure of a monster which has been engorging itself with humanity. He represents it figuratively as yielding to the glorified Messiah at His Second Advent and disgorging its prey in the resurrection. Looking forward to the completion of the resurrection at the close of the Millennium, he exclaims, "O Death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory?" Similarly the Prophet David likened the tomb to a great monster about to devour him, and likened the pains of his sickness to the teeth of the monster, saying, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of Sheol gat hold upon me." Then called I upon the name of the Lord, "and He helped me" (Psalm cxv. 3-6). The king was roused up from illness.

Again, the Lord, through the prophet, speaking of the great giant systems of this present time, declares that they will go down into Sheol, into death, and figuratively represents their meeting in death with the great oppressive systems of the past. (Isaiah xiv. 9-11.) But there is no suggestion of eternal torment connected with the word Sheol anywhere. And the fact that the Lord redeems our souls from Sheol, and will destroy Sheol eventually by raising mankind from the state of death, proves positively the gross error under which we labored in re-

spect to the meaning of this word and its equivalent in the New Testament Greek—Hades.

True, there is a reference to the Second Death, where we read of those who shall be brought to a knowledge of God during Messiah's Kingdom and who then shall deliberately and intelligently refuse the way of righteousness. We read: "The wicked shall be returned to Sheol, and all the nations that forgot God." (Psalm ix. 17.) These are not the ignorant and weak, but the intelligently wicked. They are not those who have never known God, but those who, after knowing Him, forget Him and willfully choose the way of sin. For such God has no blessing of life everlasting. They "shall be destroyed from amongst the people."—Acts III. 23.

In the New Testament, the word Gehenna represents the Second Death—the utter destruction of the class consigned to it. As every scholar knows, Gehenna is the Greek form of the Hebrew word Geh-hinnom. It was the name of a valley outside the wall of Jerusalem, long used as a garbage furnace for the destruction of the offal. But it was never recognized by God as a place for torture or sufferings, or for any living creature.

Although the capital punishment of the Divine Law is death, annihilation, God has subordinate punishments, all of which are for reformation, or we might properly say, all of which are designed to be purgatorial, purifying. Amongst the Scriptures referring to these we might include St. Peter's words, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which shall try you—purify you and test your character, to demonstrate your faithfulness as the people of God and your worthiness of association with Messiah in His glorious Kingdom to be set up at His Second Advent."—I Peter iv. 12.

St. Paul, writing along the same lines, calls these "light afflictions, which are but for a moment," and designed to "work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (II Corinthians iv. 17.) They thus work out blessings for the Church by purifying them as New Creatures, eliminating the dross from the gold.

Malachi's prophecy it is foretold that Jesus would institute purgatorial experiences amongst the consecrated people of God, the antitypical Levites. He does this to purify them of dross and to enable those who have offered their lives to God sacrificially, to be acceptable as His members. We read: "He shall sit as a Refiner and Purifier of silver, to purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an acceptable sacrifice."

Jesus has thus been sitting as the Refiner and Purifier of His Church for more than eighteen centuries. The fires of persecution, tribulation, which have permitted to come upon them are all purgative—designed to purify, to purge, to make them white. His people have the assurance that He will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able, but will with every temptation provide a way of escape.

The Whole World Lieth in the Wicked One.

All are "children of wrath," and still under Divine sentence of condemnation, except the Church of the Firstborn—the antitypical Levites. Spirit-begotten. We who have thus been called out from the world have the settlement of our prospects for life everlasting or the Second Death in this Age, before the blessing of the Lord comes to mankind in general. The Church's trial and purgatorial experiences must all take place during this Age, before the New Age opens, which in the Divine arrangement is provided for the world's judgment. "God has appointed a Day [the Day of Christ, a thousand years] in the which He will Judge the world in righteousness [i.e., to each a fair, full, righteous opportunity for reconciliation] by that Man whom He hath ordained [The Christ, of which Jesus is the Head and His faithful followers the members]."—Acts xvi. 31.

The World's Purgatory Future. The Church of Christ constitute the Elect, the spiritual Seed of Abraham, through which all the families of the earth, the non-elect, are to be blessed, according to God's promise. The foundation for the world's blessing was laid in the same sacrifice of Jesus by which the Church's reconciliation was made possible. Nevertheless, the prospects for the Church and the world are quite different. The Church, through following her Redeemer voluntarily and sacrificially, in suffering for righteousness' sake, is to be crowned with glory, honor and immortality, beyond the veil, with the spirit nature.

By this, the glorious resurrection change, the Church will be prepared for association with her Lord in His great work of blessing Adam and his race—regenerating them. A thousand years have been set apart for the work by the great Life-Giver. The life to be given to the willing and obedient of mankind will be earthly life, human life, human perfection, in Paradise restored, world-wide.

As purgatorial experiences are wise and proper as respects the Church, similarly fiery trials and chastisements are the Lord's plan for dealing with mankind for their good. The purgatorial experiences will prevail especially at the beginning of the New Dispensation and will be abated for all who will turn to Messiah, seek forgiveness and strive to walk in ways of righteousness. And ways of righteousness will then not mean, as now to the Church, self-sacrifice. Now the Divine rule is that "He that saveth his life shall lose it"; but then who ever would save his life may save it by obedience to the Divine laws, by abstinence to the extent of his ability from sin. Such may gradually rise up

out of their imperfection, mental, moral and physical, to the grand image of God originally represented in Father Adam and lost through his disobedience and his sentence of death.

True, the world has had its sufferings all through the past; the whole creation has groaned and travailed together under the infliction of the sentence of death pronounced against Father Adam and holding fast against all of his posterity. To some extent these have been judgments or punishments for sins; but on the whole we cannot call the world's experiences during the past six thousand years purgatorial. Purgatorial experiences would be those administered under the eye and care of a great director, and designed to be of a ministering nature.

Hot Purgatorial Fires Soon.

Numerous are the symbolical pictures used in the Scriptures to explain and yet to hide the character of the purgatorial experiences of the world, as they will begin in an awful time of trouble as soon as the Church shall have passed beyond the veil by the First Resurrection change. These terrible troubles coming upon the world are designed of the Lord to purge the world, to bring mankind to a due sense of responsibility, and to show the desirability of righteousness and the undesirability of sin.

"Wait ye upon Me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey; for My determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them Mine indignation, even all My fierce anger; for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy." (Zephaniah iii. 8.) Here we have the purgatorial fire with which the New Dispensation will be ushered in. It will be on earth, and not in some unknown place—neither in the interior of the earth, nor "beyond the bounds of time and space." It will be purgatorial in the sense that it will be under the supervision of the Lord, with a view to bringing a blessing to mankind out of that trouble.

That a blessing will come out of it is indicated by the sentence following, which tells that amid the severity of the trouble God will grant grace and mercy and blessing. "Then will I turn unto the people a pure Message, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent." (Zephaniah iii. 9.) Thus we have another evidence that this is purgatorial or symbolical fire or trouble, and not literal fire, otherwise no people would be left to whom the pure Message could be given. But God's intention is that all mankind, living and dead, shall come to a knowledge of the Truth, for Christ Jesus by the grace of God "tasted death for every man."

The trouble which will follow the gathering of the Church to the heavenly plane, by the First Resurrection, is symbolically represented as the melting of the earth (society) with the fervent heat (strife, contention, discord) of that time. Already we see the Capitalistic element and the Socialistic element and the Labor element preparing for the contest which is to constitute the great "time of trouble such as never was before."

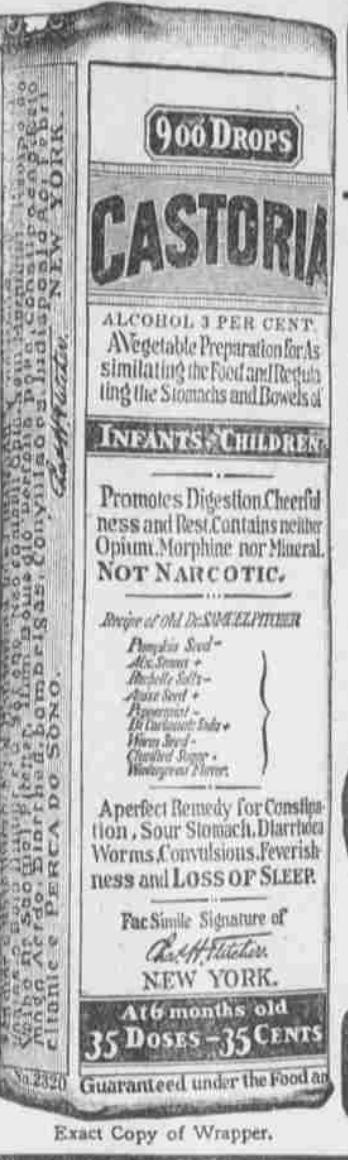
Not only so, but the "heavens" also will take fire and pass away with a great noise. These are Scripturally shown to be the symbolical heavens, the ecclesiastical heavens. Thus the intimation of the prophecy is that the social strife will extend to and include, not only social, political and financial conditions, but also include Ecclesiasticism. The fiery trouble of anarchy will consume everything of the present, and make way for the New Dispensation, of which St. Peter tells us. In the same symbolical language he calls the New Dispensation "new heavens and a new earth." The "new heavens" will be the Church in glory. The "new earth" will be the new social order of things established by that Heavenly Kingdom—a reign of righteousness. Justice, leading on to a reign of love.—II Peter III. 10-13.

This great purgatorial experience at the inauguration of the New Dispensation is again Scripturally likened to a "fire." As we read: "The proud, ye, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."—Malachi iv. 1.

All the fires of that time will be fires of righteousness, consuming the things of pride, sin and iniquity. They will burn as long as there is anything sinful to consume. As quickly as pride is abandoned, as quickly as evil-doing is abandoned, so quickly will the fires cease. But the Prophet declares that those purgatorial fires will be thoroughgoing. They will leave neither root nor branch of pride and wickedness.

The intimation in this is that the fire soon to begin may in individual cases burn on and on—perhaps in the cases of some individuals for a century, for the declaration is that all will be smitten down in the Second Death who shall fail to make some progress towards righteousness during the first hundred years of purgatorial and disciplinary experiences. The sinner a hundred years old shall be cut off (Isaiah xlv. 20).

We also note the great distinction between the sufferings of this present time and those of the future. The Church suffers from the Adversary and his misguided servants; and the Lord merely supervises, that these sufferings shall not be too severe nor beyond our power of endurance. But the purgatorial experiences of the future will be along reverse lines. Only evil-doers will suffer, and all the chastisements will be meted out by the great Redeemer with a view to purging mankind from sin and selfishness and preparing them by Restitution for the Heavenly Father's everlasting blessing—eternal life.



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