

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE  
DOCTRINE OF ENDLESS  
PUNISHMENT: ITS CLAIMS TO  
DIVINE ORIGIN REFUTED, IN A  
SERIES OF LECTURES**

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An Examination of the Doctrine of Endless Punishment: Its Claims to Divine Origin Refuted, in a Series of Lectures by I. D. Williamson

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**I. D. WILLIAMSON**

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OF

ENDLESS PUNISHMENT:

ITS CLAIMS TO DIVINE ORIGIN REFUTED,

IN A

*Series of Lectures,*

BY REV. I. D. WILLIAMSON, D. D.

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EXAMINATION OF THE DOCTRINE  
OF  
ENDLESS PUNISHMENT.

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SERMON I.

SPIRIT OF THE DOCTRINE.

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."—1 John, iv: 1.

It is scarcely necessary to observe that there are, in the world, many different and even contradictory doctrines, claiming the name of Christianity. The text would seem to indicate, very plainly, that it is the duty of the Christian to examine all doctrines, for the purpose of determining whether they are, or are not, of God. It is the object of the present, and it will be the design of some subsequent lectures, to discharge this duty so far as the doctrine of endless misery is concerned. I may, perhaps, be allowed to say in the outset, without incurring the charge of egotism, that I was formerly a believer in that doctrine. The creed that contained it was rocked in my cradle with me, and it was most sedulously taught me "from my youth up." Against all my early impressions, and the strong prejudices of education, I

have rejected it, for reasons that appear to me to be good and substantial; and it is my purpose to lay some of these reasons before you. I cannot hope that all who hear me will view them in precisely the same light with myself; and though I fail to convince, yet I trust I shall, in the end, have the satisfaction of knowing that my duty has been plainly, candidly, and affectionately done. Without further preliminary remarks, I proceed directly to the work proposed.

I. My first objection to the doctrine is, that it is plainly and most clearly anti-Christian in its spirit.

You will bear in mind, that we are directed in our text to "try the spirits, whether they be of God," and will therefore, I trust, have no hesitation about the propriety of the work in which we are engaged.

There is one great principle of truth, applicable alike to the physical and moral world, in view of which we should conduct this examination. It is laid down by the Saviour thus: "The tree is known by its fruit, and the fountain by the waters that it sends forth." "Grapes do not grow on thorns, nor figs on thistles; neither doth the same fountain send forth waters both bitter and sweet."

Now, all systems of doctrine have some great leading features, which mark them as distinct from all others; and one of these features is, the *spirit* which pervades them. Thus, for instance, the Mahometan religion is essentially contentious and warlike in its spirit. Its author was a "man of war," and his

religion was established by the sword and the javelin. He taught his followers to fight for the faith, and promised the highest seat in heaven to those who bled and died in the battle for its defence. Its spirit, therefore, is the spirit of war.

Should you tell the Mahometan that he ought to submit even to insult and injury with patience, and "resist not evil," he would tell you that your teachings were anti-Mahometan in spirit. The prophet himself fought, and your doctrine is opposed to the spirit of his whole life, and all his teachings; and by this he would decide with as much certainty as by the clearest testimony of the Koran.

So the Christian religion is essentially a system of "peace and good will." Its spirit is the spirit of love and kindness. Its author breathed this spirit in all his works and ways. Love is the very essence, the *life* and *soul* of the gospel; and I am prepared to reject any and every doctrine and practice as anti-Christian, that is opposed to this all-pervading principle of love. I care not who preaches it, or by what ingenuity men may endeavor to extort it from the sacred writings, if it breathe the spirit of revenge or hatred, it is no more certain that Mahometanism and Christianity are not identical, than it is that such a doctrine or precept is no part of the Gospel; for "the same fountain doth not send forth waters both bitter and sweet." Thus, then, without resort to "doubtful interpretations, or disputations about words," but by a test as infallible as the trial of gold