

**THE DOCTRINE OF  
ENDLESS  
PUNISHMENT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649563821

The Doctrine of Endless Punishment by William G. T. Shedd

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**WILLIAM G. T. SHEDD**

**THE DOCTRINE OF  
ENDLESS  
PUNISHMENT**



THE DOCTRINE  
OF  
ENDLESS PUNISHMENT

BY  
WILLIAM G. T. SHEDD, D.D.  
ROOSEVELT PROFESSOR OF SYMBOLIC THEOLOGY IN UNION THEOLOGICAL  
SEMINARY, NEW YORK

*cg*

*as*

NEW YORK  
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS  
1886



COPYRIGHT, 1888, BY  
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

TRON'S  
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING COMPANY,  
NEW YORK.

27  
836  
• 557

## P R E F A C E .

---

At the request of the editor of the North American Review, the author of this book prepared an argument in defence of the doctrine of Endless Punishment, which was published in the number of that periodical for February, 1885. It was agreed that the writer should have the right to republish it at a future time. Only the rational argument was presented in the article. The author now reproduces it, adding the Biblical argument, and a brief historical sketch.

Every doctrine has its day to be attacked, and defended. Just now, that of Eternal Retribution is strenuously combated, not only outside of the church, but to some extent within it. Whoever preaches it is said, by some, not "to preach to the times"—as if the sin of this time were privileged, and stood in a different relation to the law and judgment of God, from that of other times.

The argument from Scripture here given turns principally upon the meaning of Sheol and Hades, and of the adjective *aláwtos*. In determining the signification of the former, the author has relied mainly upon the logic and aim of the inspired writers. The reasoning of a writer is a clue to his technical terms. When his object unquestionably is to alarm and deter, it is rational to infer that his phraseology has a meaning in his own mind that is adapted to this. When, therefore, the wicked are threatened with a Sheol and a Hades, it must be an erroneous interpretation that empties them of all

the force of a threat. And such is the interpretation which denies that either term denotes the place of retributive suffering.

It is freely acknowledged, that if the meaning of Sheol, or Hades, is to be derived from the usage of a majority of the fathers, and the schoolmen generally, it has no special and exclusive reference to the wicked, and is not of the nature of an evil for them alone. If Sheol, or Hades, is nothing but an underworld for all souls, then it is morally nondescriptive, and whatever of danger there may be in an underworld pertains alike to the righteous and the wicked. But if the Scriptures themselves, and their interpretation by a portion of the fathers, and the reformers generally, are consulted, it is claimed that the position taken in this book, that Sheol, or Hades, is the equivalent of the modern Hell, will hold. It is with eschatology as it is with ecclesiastical polity. If the authority of the Post Nicene fathers and the schoolmen is conceded to be the chief determinant of the questions at issue, the prelatist will carry the day. But if the Bible and the interpretation of the Apostolic and Reformation churches are appealed to, he will lose it. The simplicity of the faith was departed from, when under Hellenizing influences in the church the Heathen Orcus was substituted for the Biblical Hades. A superstitious and materializing eschatology came in along with the corruption of the Christian system, and held sway for a thousand years, until the return to the Scriptures themselves by the leaders of the Reformation, restored the older and purer type of doctrine.

Although the author, in the prosecution of the argument, does not turn aside to enlarge upon the awfulness of the doctrine of Endless Punishment, it must not be supposed that he is unimpressed by it. It is a doctrine which throws in its sol-



enn shadows upon even the most careless human life. No man is utterly indifferent to the possible issues of the great Hereafter. The fall and eternal ruin of an immortal spirit is the most dreadful event conceivable. That some of God's rational and self-determined creatures will forever be in deadly enmity to him, cannot be thought of without sorrow and awe. But from the nature of finite free will, it is a possibility ; and it is revealed to us as a fact, as clearly as the facts of incarnation and redemption. Neither the Christian ministry, nor the Christian church, are responsible for the doctrine of Eternal Perdition. It is given in charge to the ministry, and to the church, by the Lord Christ himself, in his last commission, as a truth to be preached to every creature. If they are false to this trust, his message to the church of Ephesus is for them : "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works ; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Rev. 2 : 5). The question, How many are to be saved ? the Son of God refused to answer—thereby implying that his mercy is unobligated and sovereign. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" (Rom. 9 : 15). It becomes man the sinner, not to murmur at this. That incarnate God who has vicariously *suffered* more for man's sin, than any man has or will personally, surely has the right to determine the method and extent of his own self-immolating compassion. To the transgressor who says, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," he answers, "I will, be thou clean" (Mark 1 : 40). But to the transgressor who looks upon redemption as something to which he is entitled, he replies, as in the parable, "Is it not lawful for me, to do what I will with mine own ?" (Matt. 20 : 15).

The kindest way, therefore, for both the preacher and the

hearer is, to follow the revealed word of God, and teach the plain and exact truth. Eternal perdition is like any other danger. In order to escape danger, one must believe in it. Disbelief of it is sure destruction. To be forewarned, is to be forearmed. They who foresee an evil, prepare for it and avoid it; but "the simple pass on and are punished." Speaking generally, those who believe that there is a hell, and intelligently fear it, as they are commanded to do by Christ himself, will escape it; and those who deny that there is a hell, and ridicule it, will fall into it. Hence the minister of Christ must be as plain as Christ, as solemn as Christ, and as tender as Christ, in the announcement of this fearful truth. "When he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke 19:41, 42).

The dogmatic bearings of Universalism are not to be overlooked. The rejection of the doctrine of Endless Punishment cuts the ground from under the gospel. Salvation supposes a prior damnation. He who denies that he deserves eternal death cannot be saved from it so long as he persists in his denial. If his denial is the truth, he needs no salvation. If his denial is an error, the error prevents penitence for sin, and this prevents pardon. No error, consequently, is more fatal than that of Universalism. It blots out the attribute of retributive justice; transmutes sin into misfortune, instead of guilt; turns all suffering into chastisement; converts the piacular work of Christ into moral influence; and makes it a debt due to man, instead of an unmerited boon from God. No tenet is more radical and revolutionizing, in its influence upon the Christian system. The attempt to retain the evangelical theology in connection with it is futile.

The destructive nature of the error is still more apparent in practical theology. Could it be proved that the Christian church have been deceived in finding the doctrine of Endless Punishment in the Christian Scriptures, and that there is no such thing, havoc would be made of all the liturgies of the Church, as well as of its literature. Consider the following petition from the "Morning Prayer for Families," in the book of Common Prayer used in the Episcopal church: "Keep in our minds a lively remembrance of that great day in which we must give a strict account of our thoughts, words, and actions, and according to the works done in the body be eternally rewarded or punished by him whom thou hast appointed the Judge of quick and dead, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Suppose, after uttering this petition, the person to say to himself: "There is no eternal punishment." Consider, again, that searching and anguished cry from the Litany: "From thy wrath, and from everlasting damnation, Good Lord, deliver us," and imagine a bystander to say to the soul that has just agonized this prayer: "Thou fool, there is no everlasting damnation." And the effect of this denial is equally destructive in devotional literature. Take the doctrine of eternal perdition, and the antithetic doctrine of eternal salvation, out of the Confessions of Augustine; out of the Sermons of Chrysostom; out of the Imitation of à Kempis; out of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress; out of Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Dying; out of Baxter's Saints' Everlasting Rest; and what is left?

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,  
NEW YORK, November 18, 1885.