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A SERIES OF SERMONS
IN DEFENCE OF THE
DOCTRINE OF UNIVERSAL SALVATION.

BY OTIS A. SKINNER.

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S E R M O N I.

THE DOCTRINE OF ENDLESS WO IRRECONCILABLE WITH DIVINE GOODNESS

“The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works” —Psalm cxlv. 9.

THE doctrine of endless wo is the most dreadful in its nature, and fearful in its results, of any one ever promulgated in the Christian church. No other evil so great as that which it threatens could possibly fall upon a human being. And yet, it is a doctrine which has been zealously advocated, ever since about A. D. 500. From that time down to the present, it has been regarded by the great body of the church as an essential doctrine of the Bible, and as one of the most efficient means, furnished by Heaven, for the prevention of crime, and the promotion of virtue. It is true, there have always been some who have denied its correctness, and many who doubted its beneficial tendency. This number has been rapidly increasing ever since the reformation; and, within the last half century, a most astonishing change has been produced in the opinions of the Christian world.

In Germany , the doctrine has been almost driven from the church; and in England and France, while some have ceased to preach it, others have come boldly out against it. In this country, the change is equally encouraging. Our denomination has become numerous and powerful.

But those who reject the eternity of punishment are not confined to our order. The Dunkers, Moravians, Shakers, and Unitarians do not preach it. Among the clergy of the Episcopal, the Methodist, and the Orthodox churches, there are many who secretly believe with us.

This, however, is not the greatest change which has been experienced. We must look for that in the modification which the doctrine of endless wo has experienced among all limitarian sects; in its increasing repulsiveness to the feelings of its professed believers, and in the general unwillingness of the people to have it faithfully preached. It falls now gratefully upon almost every ear; it appears so dreadful, and cruel, and unreasonable, that few Christians can be found that will countenance the man who makes it the burden of his labors.

Not only so. By comparing the sermons of the present age with those preached a century since, we shall find that ministers not only say far less about an endless hell than formerly, but what they say is in milder terms. A century since, the phrases, a “burning hell,” “endless damnation,” “almighty vengeance,” were as common as the words “God,” “Christ,” and “Gospel.”

Then, descriptions of this place, intensity and duration of misery, were introduced into every sermon, and constituted the chief topics of all the preaching. Now, you may listen to men of the same sects for months, and, hear nothing of the kind; and now, instead of saying “burning hell,” “almighty vengeance,” “arrows of infinite wrath,” and “thunderbolts of an enraged God,” they say “the unhappiness of the future state,” or “the stings of conscience.”

All this is truly encouraging; it shows that the leaven is operating, that the schoolmaster is abroad, and that the day is approaching when this mammoth error shall be exterminated from the Christian world. We have reason, then, to persevere in our exertions, to go forward in the work of opposing error and defending truth; for if we are faithful, the victory will soon be ours.

I have thought, therefore, that a series of controversial sermons might be useful, and serve to aid the advancement of truth; and I trust I shall be pardoned for stepping aside from my ordinary mode of preaching, and presenting you, for a few successive Sabbaths, sermons which are chiefly doctrinal. Today, it will be my object to show, that the doctrine of endless misery is irreconcilable with Divine goodness.

Limitarian Christians may be divided into two parties—Calvinists and Arminians. All who teach endless misery, teach it in accordance with the views of one or the other of these parties. Let us then inquire,

I. IF CALVINISM CAN BE RECONCILED WITH GOODNESS.

In order to proceed understandingly, we must ascertain what are the properties of Divine goodness.

These have been thus described by Dr. Gill. He says, First, There is no cause of goodness outside of God. The sinner loves God because he first loved him. Second: It is immutable; it is like himself: the same yesterday, today, and forever. It admits of no distinctions by which it appears to alter or vary. It neither increases

nor decreases. There never were any stops or impediments to this goodness. Third: The goodness of God endures forever; *** it can never be dissolved; nothing can separate it, or separate from it.

This description of the properties of goodness is imperfect; it does not present them all. Goodness is infinitely great. It is also impartial. Speaking of its greatness, the apostle said, Neither height nor depth, things present nor things to come, life nor death, can separate from it. (Rom. viii. 38, 39.) Speaking of its impartiality, the text says, the Lord is good unto all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. The Savior also says, God so loved the world as to send his Son to save it. (John iii. 16, 17.)

Here, then, we have five properties of divine goodness. It is *free—immutable—eternal—infinite—and impartial.*

With these distinctly in mind, we will proceed to inquire whether the eternity of misery can be reconciled with such goodness. I will ask you to look first at the opinion which represents Deity as arbitrarily dooming a part of mankind to endless agony. According to this, the sinner is doomed to hell, not as a punishment for sin, but to gratify God's sovereign will. There is one singular circumstance with regard to this system of faith. While it teaches that, from the foundation of the world, before man had done either good or evil, and without any foresight of faith or good works, God elected a certain number to endless life, and reprobated the rest to endless death; it teaches, also, that sinners are punished endlessly for the sins committed on earth! Now how can they be doomed to endless misery for their sins, and yet be doomed there by a decree made before they had an existence?

Do you say, the decree was made in anticipation of what their characters would be? I reply, that is contrary to the express declaration of the creed in which this system of reprobation is taught; for the creed says, *the decree was made without any foresight of the character which the reprobate would sustain.* Its language is, "Without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto."

Besides, the creed teaches, that some were doomed to perdition expressly for God's glory, and the gratification of his sovereign will; and not because he consulted the good of his subjects. Nor is this all. The decree of reprobation cut

them off from all agency, and drove them into sin. It was as impossible for them not to do wrong, as for the deaf to hear, and blind to see. Look at the following, from the Westminster Confession: “By the decree of God for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predisposed unto everlasting life, and others pre-ordained to everlasting death. Neither are any others redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified and saved, but the elect only; the rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.”

The same idea is set forth in the Confession of Faith adopted by the Second Baptist Church of this city. Article V. says: “We believe that all who have ever been, or who will be hereafter brought to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, were from the beginning chosen in him to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; and that, in consequence of the everlasting love of God to them through the great atonement, the Holy Spirit is sent down to effect the work of regeneration in their hearts, without whose influence none would ever repent or believe.”

According to this, all who were to be saved were elected to life from the beginning; and to such the Holy Spirit is given. Now, as without its agency none can believe or be saved, and as the Spirit is given to none but the elect, the non-elect are necessarily lost; they are excluded from grace by the Divine decree. And yet, the advocates of this theory preach about the guilt of sinners in rejecting the Gospel and despising God. They represent them as appearing before the bar of God, to be judged according to their deeds; and they zealously and pathetically urge sinners to repent, that they may escape the punishments of eternity! What an assemblage of inconsistencies! How surprising that they should be crowded into one system, and taught as divine truths!

Again.—Reprobation to endless death is opposed to impartial goodness.

The Lord is good unto all. How is he good to all? Can he be thus good, and doom a portion of mankind to endless suffering? To be impartial, he must deal by all alike—grant to all the same favors and mercies. But does he, according to the popular system of election and reprobation? What favor does he give to the elect? He gives them all the enjoyments of life. He surrounds them with friends who are cordial in their attachment, and assiduous in contributing to their happiness. For them he has lit up the heavens with beauty, loaded the earth with plenty, and

crowded the world with all that is rich and captivating. For them, too, prophets preached, Jesus lived, and died, and rose, and apostles proclaimed the good news of salvation. And for them, an inheritance, which is undefiled and fadeth not away, has been prepared in heaven. These are God's favors to the elect—these are the ways in which he is good to them.

But to the reprobate he is not thus good. Let it not be replied, the blessings of life are free for all men, and in their equal distribution we see God's impartiality: for life is a curse to the slave of sin. Not only so, all blessings are curses to the reprobate, inasmuch as they will only enhance his misery beyond the grave.

Even the instructions of the heaven sent messengers are curses; for they cannot be received by the reprobate; and if they could, they would only wake up a hope, which would aggravate his despair, and sharpen the arrows which will pierce his soul in eternity.

The reprobate, then, has no blessing in this world, and surely none in the world to come. That, to him, is the land of darkness and pain. There, no ray of hope will ever visit his despairing bosom, and no respite from agony be for a moment enjoyed. He will suffer an eternity of uninterrupted and ever increasing pain. Thus, existence to him is an endless curse!

Here we see there is an infinite difference in the condition of the elect and non-elect; and that this difference is purely the result of an arbitrary decree. How, then, can we say God is impartially good? If he is good to the elect, he cannot be to the non-elect; for, while he raises the former to an eternity of happiness, he dooms the latter to an eternity of misery.

This, then, contradicts the general voice of Scripture, which teaches that God is good to all men; that his mercy extends to all; and that the provisions of his grace are made for the whole world.

Let it not be said, God is impartially good, because this arrangement confers upon all men the greatest amount of happiness which it is possible for them to enjoy; for this is assuming that it is impossible for God to make all men happy—a position which destroys his perfections and makes him both weak and unwise.

I know it has been argued, that the greatest possible good of the world consists in the endless misery of a part, and the endless happiness of a part. But a bare

statement of such a position is sufficient to expose its fallacy; for, certainly, the greatest good of any given number must be the greatest good of each one; and, therefore, the greatest good of the world must be the greatest good of each individual of the world. If it be not so, there is no difference between the greatest good and the greatest evil of the world; for, if the greatest possible good of all men consists in the endless happiness of a part and the endless misery of a part, the greatest misery of all must be the same; and, hence, there is no difference between saying God is good to all and evil to all.

Now, surely, that must be a singular idea of goodness which makes it synonymous with hatred. And yet, such is the inevitable conclusion to which we are driven by the system of election, whenever we attempt to reconcile it with impartial goodness!

Let us discard the system, then, and acknowledge that God is good to all men; good because he treats all with equal favor and kindness. Hence, if God is impartially good, he cannot have doomed one soul, by an arbitrary decree, to endless wo. This Dr. Gill himself saw; and, therefore, in mentioning the properties of goodness, he did not mention its impartiality. But God is good to all; and in the exercise of this goodness he sent his Son to die for the world. None, therefore, are reprobates.

I will now pass to the consideration of another theory—one which is thought to make the doctrine of endless wo perfectly compatible with divine goodness.

II. ARMINIANISM OPPOSED TO DIVINE GOODNESS.

This theory may be thus stated: God is good.

Guided by goodness, he placed all men in a situation where they might be saved; and, therefore, if they are not, it is no fault of his; so that those who are lost have none but themselves to blame.

This is thought to be a perfect vindication of the Divine character, and to justify him in the infliction of infinite and endless agony upon all who die impenitent. But, in my opinion, it is vastly more defective than the theory we have been examining; for while that does not conflict with more than one property of goodness, this conflicts with every one. I know not that we can make a single exception. Let us examine it with reference to the five properties of goodness.

1. Arminianism opposed to impartial goodness.

Those who believe this theory dwell with great power and eloquence upon universal goodness. They say, we see it in the sun and stars; in the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. They say, too, that we see it in the calls of mercy, in the precepts of duty, in the provisions of love, and in the death of Jesus. Hence they reject with abhorrence the idea that God is partial, and has decreed some to endless perdition. They unequivocally declare, that it contradicts all we know of God. But do they not also make God partial?

Look at facts. All men are not alike constituted. They have different temperaments, dispositions, and inclinations. Some are mild and amiable; others, querulous and cruel. Some have a strong natural inclination to do right; others have a strong natural inclination to do wrong. Now suppose these different persons are judged by the same laws, and that all who come short of certain attainments are doomed to endless wo; would God be impartial? Would the querulous and cruel, and those with strong appetites, stand on an equal footing with the others?

Again. All are not equally favored in the opportunities they enjoy. Some live where they are blessed with social privileges, and where they are so surrounded by good influences that they could hardly go astray if they would. Others are born and brought up in sinks of moral pollution: they hear constantly the language of profaneness, witness daily acts of violence, and are surrounded by those who are beastly, intemperate, and disregard, all the institutions of religion.

Now surely the advantages of these persons are by no means equal; and if they are to be judged according to the characters they form here, God is a partial being.

The same remarks will apply to the heathen and Christian world. The advantages of the latter are vastly superior to those of the former; and consequently they stand a much better chance of salvation. indeed, some say that the heathen have no chance whatever, and that they are daily sinking into hell, because ignorant of him of whom they have never heard!

Here, then, are inequalities, which destroy the impartiality of God, if we admit, in connection with them, the eternity of suffering. They as effectually destroy the

divine impartiality as does a decree of reprobation; for, in consequence of the unfavorable circumstances under which some are placed, they are made heirs of endless perdition; and others are made heirs of glory in consequence of the superior advantages they enjoy. There is an infinite difference in the destiny of men, because they are differently constituted, or are surrounded by different influences.

Thus is God partial. He grants favors to one which he withholds from another; and, owing to the difference of character arising from this difference in the favors enjoyed, a part are made endlessly happy, and a part endlessly miserable. The text is a sufficient refutation of this idea; for if the Lord be good to all, he must so arrange his providence that all shall in the end enjoy an equal amount of mercies and privileges.

2. The theory we are now examining, and which teaches that all may be saved, and if they are not, no blame can be attached to God, is opposed to the greatness of his goodness. Our efforts to benefit an individual are always in proportion to the strength of our love. See the labors of a devoted mother, for her sick and helpless child. For this she will toil by day and watch by night. While such is the course of a good mother, an unfeeling, hardened woman may permit a helpless child, that has been entrusted to her care, to perish from cruel neglect. All this difference is owing to love. The mother is prompted to her toils and watchings by the strength of her affections. We are right, therefore, in saying, the efforts of love to benefit its objects will always be in proportion to its greatness. Hence, to see what God will do for the soul, we have only to ask, How great is his love? But here is no chance for controversy; for it has already been established, that God's love is infinite—it is equal to his power and wisdom. It will, therefore, do for man all that it is possible should be done; it will make him as happy as a finite intelligence can be.

Now will goodness do this, according to the theory in question? Has it provided a way by which this grand result shall be accomplished? All will answer, no, for the theory consigns countless millions to endless sufferings. It will avail nothing to say, those who are lost might have been saved—they are doomed to endless woe for a voluntary neglect of privileges; because had the provisions of goodness been the best which God was capable of making, they would have been effectual in the salvation of all, and there would have been no contingency in regard to the result of his plan of grace.

The theory, then, allows that God is not infinitely good; for it says, he simply does that for man which renders it possible for him to be saved; whereas, he might have done more—he might have provided means which would render his salvation certain. We must, therefore, either deny the theory, or deny the infinity of God's goodness.

There is another difficulty. Those who are not saved are not left to suffer the natural consequences of despising the offers of grace ; but God dooms them to all the agonies he can inflict; he pursues them with infinite vengeance; he makes them miracles of endless suffering. Now wherein is the goodness of this? Why torture them endlessly? Why make a prison of torture, in which to torment them through ages interminable? What is there good in this?

Besides, when God provided the means of salvation he knew who would be saved and who lost. He knew all things from the beginning of the world. Was there any great goodness in making provisions which he knew would be of no service? Can I be justly reckoned good for offering to aid the poor or help the distressed, when I know that my offers will not be accepted?

This question does not reach back far enough; for God not only knew that his offers would not be accepted, but that they would be the means of aggravating the endless misery of countless millions. Now would you think me very good for making an offer to an individual, which I foresaw would prove a great curse to him? No, you would not; but judging my motive by the expected results, you would call me evil in making the offer.

God, therefore, is not infinitely good according to this system; for he has not done all that was possible—he has only offered salvation, when he might have secured it to the world. Indeed, the system teaches that God is evil to some; for he formed a plan which he foresaw would be the means of adding to the unending torment of a great proportion of his children. Now as we should judge the motives of God by the expected result of his dealings, we must conclude that he is not good in any sense or degree to those who are lost, and that he never designed they should be benefited by the means of grace.

3. Arminianism is opposed to the immutability and eternity of goodness.

All who advocate the theory in question maintain that it justifies them in saying, God is perfectly good, because it was an act of infinite mercy to make provision

for all men, and send his Son to give himself a ransom for their sins. If we disconnect from this act God's infinite knowledge, we must allow that he was good in so doing. But we cannot disconnect his knowledge from the act; the understanding of God is infinite; known unto him are all things; and, therefore, we cannot avoid the conclusion, that he designed just the result which will occur.

Let us, however, waive this consideration, and say his design was really good, infinitely good. This position admits that goodness seeks the happiness of man, and that it can have no other end in view. If, therefore, God should ever inflict a torture intended only to curse those who suffer it, he is not good to them—he pursues a course the opposite of that pursued in sending his Son to die for our redemption. But his goodness is immutable and eternal, and therefore, he cannot change his course; it must always be the same as when he devised a way for human redemption.

Do you say this reasoning is opposed to fact; for God punishes sinners? I answer, disciplinary punishment is beneficial to the sinner, as Paul says; God chastens for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness (Heb. xii. 10.). Just as certain, then, as divine goodness is eternal and immutable, so certain will God never change the system of his government towards any creature. The moment he changes this, his goodness changes, or ceases to be.

I cannot, therefore, admit that, when the wicked shall have passed into the future state, God will become their enemy; he will there be to them the same gracious being which he is now; for he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He will there open to them the storehouse of his grace, unfold to them the riches of his love, and cause the light of heaven to beam upon them in all its brilliancy and glory. His arms of compassion will there be round about them; and he will be their God, and they shall be his people.

God's plan of government has never yet changed. It is the same now as when he watched over the patriarchs in all the tenderness of infinite mercy, and as when he first disclosed the full and blessed provision of grace through Jesus Christ. As it has been, so will it ever be. When countless ages shall have passed away, and we shall have wondered all that time at the extent and riches of God's mercies, he will still be gracious and good, and be engaged in carrying forward the same holy purposes which he formed in the beginning. God's goodness is immutable and eternal.

4. Arminianism is opposed to the freeness of love. If we have any doubt in regard to this reasoning, it will be removed by considering, that what we do can have no influence upon God. Goodness is a part of his nature, and not something caused by human virtue or the death of Christ. Let me say, too, that the action of goodness does not depend upon anything we do. God pursues his purposes of love when we are sinful, just the same as when we are virtuous. His love is wholly uncaused, and the blessings it bestows are not induced by anything out of him. Sin, therefore, will not prevent our coming into an enjoyment of divine grace; for it is the work of goodness so to subdue the heart and destroy sin, that it shall not bar man from receiving divine grace. Goodness does not wait for the dead to come to life; it raises them up, and gives them life. It does not wait for the blind to open their eyes; but removes the blindness, and enables them to see the glory of truth. It does not wait for the wanderer to return; but sends one after him to bring him back. Goodness provides the means, opens the way and executes the work.

“Grace first contrived the way
To save rebellious man;
And all its steps that grace display
Which drew the wondrous plan.

Grace taught my roving feet
To tread the heavenly road;
And new supplies each hour I meet,
While pressing on to God.

Grace all the work shall crown,
Through everlasting days:
It lays in heaven the topmost stone,
And well deserves the praise.”

The Scriptures fully sustain the foregoing conclusions. They say,

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”—(Heb. ii. 9.)

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—(1 Tim. ii.

5, 6.)

“And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ; of whom I am chief.”—(1 Tim. i. 14, 16.)

“For it please the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.”—(Col. i. 19, 20.)

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”—(Eph. iii. 8.)

“In this was manifested the love of god towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”—(1 John iv. 9, 10.)

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”—(John xii. 32.)

“Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”—(1 Cor. xv. 4, 26.)

Thus do the Scriptures teach that the free, immutable, eternal, infinite and impartial goodness of God, will save all men from sin, and exalt them to immortal glory.

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