

Ques. Please explain [Matt. 25:46](#).

Ans. The punishment and reward are of equal duration. We are here told that the reward will be *life*, but in this passage the nature of the punishment is not specified. Readers generally take for granted that it means everlasting *misery* and *torment*. They infer this from some symbolic expressions used in the book of Revelations, which they confess they do not understand. But God's Word nowhere says that the punishment of sin is torment. If we admit what is here stated that their punishment will be equal in *duration* with the reward promised, and will then inquire of the Word--What is the nature of the punishment?--we shall soon have light. We read, "The soul (person) that sinneth, it shall *die*;"--"The wages of sin is *death*, but the gift of God is eternal life." So we find it quite harmonious. "These shall go away into eternal punishment *death*, from which there will be no release --no resurrection); but the righteous into life eternal.

The power to live comes from God, and he promises it only to the righteous. God has an unquestionable right to deprive all his creatures of *life*, if they will not use it in harmony with his righteous will. But none but a devil of worst stamp could perpetrate eternal hopeless torment and agony upon any creature. Satan has, from the first, been a misrepresenter of God's character and word, and in this matter seems to have succeeded in deceiving many of God's dear saints. Oh, that all might learn to study God's Word in the light which it throws upon itself, and not allow the creeds and traditions of men to twist and warp their minds, destroy their peace and their trust in God, by turning the Word of God into a lie.

To what extent the minds of men may be twisted, is illustrated by the teachings of New England's great preacher of former years--Jonathan Edwards. In preaching upon the eternal punishment of the wicked, which he said was misery and torture, he pictured it so frightfully, that some in the congregation sprang from their seats screaming, and caught hold of the pillars of the church as though fearful of being dropped into the yawning chasm. We quote his sentiments, and, as nearly as we can recall, his words.

Addressing the Christians present, he said: Your hearts then will not ache for, and throb in sympathy with your friends and children; you will look over the battlements of heaven and see them in that awful everlasting torture, and turn round and praise God the louder.

What a terrible, strong delusion possessed that child of God, that he could utter such blasphemy. It was a blasphemy against men as well as against the God of love, for if there is or ever was in all the universe of God, so awfully degraded a being that he could have everlasting joy at the expense of another's everlasting misery, that one is too miserable a wretch to be worthy even of the name of devil. If being made like our glorious and perfect Head would annihilate in this manner every spark of *love*, *pity*, and *mercy*, then should we earnestly pray and hope that we to his likeness should *never* attain. Take it home to your own heart, thinking Christian--Have you by death lost a loved and cherished son or daughter, brother, sister, father, or mother, or friend, whom you feel sure walked not "*the narrow way to life*"? Think, then, of what a change must come ere you could blend with their cries of anguish, your shouts of joy and pleasure.

But no longer will such preaching frighten the people; the picture is so wide of the truth that the unprejudiced *thinker*, both in and out of the church, sees it to be the very opposite to the character of a God of love. For this reason, though the Bible has not changed, nor their creeds, theologians have generally abandoned the *fire* theory, and now say the punishment will be a gnawing of conscience. Yet when wanting to alarm some one into *love* for God, they will add that the lashings of conscience will be *even more terrible than flames*.

No wonder that many sectarians, imitating their conception of a God, become loveless and hard, and in their families exalt the rule of fear, rather than the rule of love. No one knows how

bad an effect is produced on civilized society by the monstrous ideas of God's character, as instilled by the traditions of men.

All heathen nations have horrible images of their Gods. All picture them horrible, with *malicious power*; and though Christians ignore pictures and images, yet they draw a mental picture of their God as dreadful. It surely needs much help to love a being such as they are taught he is. The wonder is that every intelligent person has not been driven into *infidelity* by it, and we verily believe that many more are skeptical than openly profess it: their actions speak loudly of it.

In God's Word we see how evil was permitted for *good* reasons, and that the "little flock" now being developed, instead of rejoicing in the misery of ninety nine one hundredths of their fellows, will be praising God and manifesting the exceeding riches of his grace in the ages to come, by blessing all the families of the earth.