

## Friendly Bible Talks

worships. If he thinks of God as implacable in revenge, he is sure to display the same disposition himself. But even in the apostate church of the Dark Ages, the human mind revolted against the idea of an eternity of torment. It is indeed unthinkable, an appalling blasphemy against the God of love. So the church invented the idea of purgatory, and thus led men to hope for some termination to their fiery torment. We owe the doctrine of purgatory, with all the priest craft and superstition that grew out of it, to the doctrine of eternal torment. Today, as you know, we get the 'larger hope' and Universalism, as a revulsion against the idea that sinners must be tormented everlastingly. So you see the doctrine has a good deal of mischief to answer for, instead of being a helpful and salutary one.

"The belief in eternal torment," continued Mr. Summers, "is itself the offspring of the false doctrine that the soul of man is by nature immortal. Everybody can see that if the soul is immortal, it must spend eternity somewhere or other. The sinner cannot enter heaven, for whatsoever defiles is excluded from that holy place; therefore, he must remain for ever in the lake of fire into which he is cast. So you see, eternal torment is an inevitable conclusion from the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. We have already noted some false doctrines which owe their existence to the falsehood of eternal torment. There are many more which spring from the mistaken teaching that the soul of man is naturally immortal. You could probably name them yourselves."

"I was running over some in my own mind," said Mr. Barker, when you mentioned purgatory. I thought:

"Why, what a hole it would make in the doctrines of the Church of Rome if people were to acknowledge the truth concerning the mortality of the soul.' It would settle all the controversy over prayers for the dead, and do away with all the saints. Who would ask a saint to intercede for him if he believed that the saint was lying asleep in the tomb until the day of resurrection?"

"And that is not all," added Mr. Summers. "Think how much the Church of Rome has to say about the Virgin Mary and her influence with her divine Son, and then reflect that she is but dust in the silent grave, and has heard not a syllable of the countless prayers that have been addressed to her for a thousand years."

"Isn't it amazing to think of it!" pondered Mr. Rogers. "What a master of fraud the devil is! I don't wonder the book of Revelation speaks of him as deceiving the whole world. Why, just think of the millions of hands that have been stretched out to Mary, and the millions of voices that have called upon her, and she as unconscious of it all as a babe unborn. How surprised she will be in the resurrection to learn about it! What a tremendous harvest of ignorance and superstition the devil can reap from the seed of a single false doctrine!"

"It shows," said Mr. Summers, "that we need to adhere closely to the Word of God, and speak it faithfully, or we may find in the judgment that we have a harvest to reap we little expected. It shows, too, that a system may look very imposing, and yet be less than vanity because based on a falsehood. But even the gross errors of the Church of Rome do not exhaust the catalogue of results that flow from the doctrine of natural immortality. The greater part of heathen religion, with its ancestor-worship and transmigration of souls, and a host of other false and hurtful theories, is founded on men's immortality. Prominent among these is the Spiritualism which is being revived in our very midst today."

"Do you really think there is anything genuine about Spiritualism?" asked Mr. Rogers. "I have read so many accounts of the exposure of trickery in connection with it that I have about made up my mind that it is all a fraud."

"Undoubtedly there has been a good deal of trickery connected with the movement, but there is also a good deal that cannot be disposed of by any such explanation," replied Mr. Summers. "Scientific men who have gone into the phenomena with the purpose of discrediting and exposing them, have been surprised to find themselves in the presence of a mystery that they could not fathom. None of their scientific tests have been able to reveal the secret. It is one of the striking features of Spiritualism that it finds so many of its converts, among the leading men of science, who accept nothing that is not capable of demonstration. No; I cannot dismiss the matter by supposing that all these able investigators have been imposed upon by clever conjuring. The true explanation is a far more serious one."

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“What do you think, then, that Spiritualism really is?” asked Mr. Barker. “I have always had an idea myself that Christians were forbidden to have anything to do with it, but I could hardly see why, if by it a man might really communicate with his departed loved ones, he should not do so. Now that I know that is impossible, I can see clearly that Spiritualism must be an evil thing. But who are the spirits that speak through the medium?”

“There is only one possible answer to that question,” replied Mr. Summers. “We know they cannot be departed human beings; therefore they must be spirits of evil or fallen angels, personating the dead.”

“How horrible!” said Mr. Rogers. “Fancy thinking you were talking to your dead mother, when all the time it was a demon!”

“It is indeed a terrible delusion,” answered Mr. Summers. “The fallen angels are not deficient in cunning, and it is certainly a masterstroke on their part to appeal to the tenderest feelings of the human heart to win acceptance for their falsehoods. But they are skilled in making temptation attractive.”

“What is the object of the demons in coming to people through this avenue of Spiritualism; do you know?” asked Mr. Barker.

“Because in that way they can secure a more perfect control over men,” answered Mr. Summers. “When one believes that a dead friend is speaking to him, or some person in whom he felt entire confidence, and when he believes, too, that that one has passed away from earth into a sphere of more perfect knowledge, you can understand how he will prize whatever information comes to him from such a source. He will think there is no revelation to be compared with that which comes from beyond the grave. Whatever is told him by the spirit, he will receive with implicit confidence. You can see, then, how the words spoken by a fallen angel, personating the dead friend, will be regarded as gospel by the recipient. Thus the teachings of demons will be firmly believed, and will, in the minds of all who yield to the delusion, displace the Scriptures given to us by God.”

“Yes, I have seen that,” said Mr. Barker. “The Spiritualists I have met usually professed to believe the Bible, but they thought that their message was far more valuable to men than the Bible, and that without it there was no real evidence of a future life.”

“Just so,” replied Mr. Summers. “In one way or another the demons displace the Word of God, and thus practically secure the honor due to Him. Wherever they can succeed in doing this, they have almost complete control over the man they lead astray. Spiritualism becomes his religion, and the message of the demons his Bible. In this way the fallen angels are seeking to carry out their old purpose of ruling the world and dethroning God. Wherever Spiritualism is accepted they gain their end, and wherever the immortality of the soul is accepted, there is the foundation laid already for the work of Spiritualism.

“Why, yes,” replied Mr. Rogers. “If a man goes on living after death, and enjoys an ampler life than he could possibly live in, the body, it would certainly seem to be a good thing to get into touch with him, if it is at all possible.”

“Just so,” replied Mr. Summers. “That is how it appeals to most people. You will hear many good and pious men say that they believe the spirits of their dead wives, or friends, are round about them, helping and inspiring them. If that be true, why can the spirits not go a step farther, and speak a few words to those in whose welfare they are so deeply interested? Once grant the immortality of the soul, and there is no apparent reason why you should not go on another step, and grant the possibility and blessedness of speaking with the dear departed. But that is Spiritualism, pure and simple. One main reason why Spiritualism has met with such remarkable success is that its foundation principle, the immortality of the soul, is taught in nearly all the churches. When Spiritualism addresses its appeals and arguments to a member of one of those churches, it finds him already instructed and grounded in its fundamental doctrine. No wonder, then, that the error spreads so rapidly. For you must not think of Spiritualism as comprehending only those who actually call themselves Spiritualists. The devil is too wise to work openly at present. It would alarm Christians too much if Spiritualism appeared before all in its true proportions.

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The way is being prepared by means of the spread of the doctrines of Spiritualism, under various names and forms suited to different classes of people. But there is a family likeness and connection among all these varieties of doctrine. Spiritualism and Theosophy and Christian Science and the New Thought and the New Theology are all phases of one movement. All of them throw away the Bible and put their emphasis on man's inherent divinity, the proof of which they find, or think they find, in the immortality of the soul. When these have done their preparatory work, I believe we shall see developments that people little expect."

"How did the doctrine of the immortality of the soul first come into existence?" asked Mr. Barker.

"That is easily answered," said Mr. Summers. "We have a record of the very first occasion on which the doctrine was preached, and we also have the name of the preacher. We also know how the idea was received. It was in the Garden of Eden that the immortality of the soul was first broached. Satan was the preacher, and Eve was the one to whom the doctrine was presented. Mr. Barker, will you read to us from the third chapter of Genesis, from the second verse to the fifth?"

Mr. Barker read accordingly: "And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

"And the serpent said to the woman, You shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

"Thank you," said Mr. Summers. "If you look at these words closely, you will notice some important points. First, there was a conflict between what the serpent said and what God said. The two statements were contrary the one to the other. God said that if man transgressed the command, he should surely die: the tempter said: 'You shall not surely die.' So before Satan could gain his end, he must persuade Eve to disbelieve and reject the word of God.

"Second, while God had told man that - he was only mortal, subject to death in the event of disobedience, Satan assured Eve that she was immortal. 'You shall not surely die.' Here is the first recorded utterance on the subject of the immortality of the soul. It was Satan who preached it, and the doctrine formed an essential part of the temptation which brought about the fall.

"Third, Satan promises that by transgression of God's command, man shall become as a god.

"Now you will find these three points emphasized today in Spiritualism, and the New Theology, and all the kindred movements I mentioned a few minutes ago. There is, first, a rejection of God's Word, second, an assurance of personal immortality, and third, an emphasis on the idea that man himself is divine.

"So you see the origin of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is entirely in keeping with the fruits it has borne in the past and is bearing today. The seed of falsehood was sown by Satan himself; the first fruits was the fall of man, and the full harvest will be reaped when 'whatsoever works abomination or makes a lie' shall find its end in the lake of fire."

"God helping me," said Mr. Barker solemnly, "I will do all that I possibly can to help others see this falsehood in its true light."

"I am truly glad to hear you say so," said Mr. Summers. "I knew if you would only go into the matter fully, and let the Bible speak for itself, that you could come to no other conclusion. I see it is time you were going, but I would like you to read just one passage more in which God speaks especially to those who strengthen themselves in the falsehood of their own immortality, and league themselves with the powers of darkness in their warfare against God. Mr. Rogers, you might read to us from the fourteenth verse of Isaiah twenty-eight."

Mr. Rogers turned to the passage named, and read: "Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, you scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because we have said, We have made a covenant with

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death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid

“Now, read on Mr. Rogers, if you please, verse seventeen,” said Mr. Summers.

“Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then you shall be trodden down by it.”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Summers. “You see from these words that it is vain to expect anything from death. The man who believes that death is a friend which will bring him enlargement of life, is going to find that covenants with death are worthless, and that the grave has nothing for him. He will perish utterly when the overflowing scourge shall pass through the land. Our efforts must be directed to save men from making their worthless covenant with death, and hiding under a refuge of falsehood. We must make known the truth concerning death and immortality to them, and tell them of the sure refuge which God has Himself provided for the time of storm.

“Therefore thus said the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.’ Christ is man’s only refuge, his one hope of escape from the grave. In Him alone is there any true promise of immortality.”

### The Judgment

“This week,” said Mr. Summers, “I want to take up the subject of the judgment which will gather up what we have studied thus far about the reward of the saints at Christ’s coming and the fate of the wicked. There is a great deal to be said about it, much more than we shall be able to cover tonight, but we can at least try to get a few points clear in our minds. You perhaps know what it means to prepare for an important examination?”

“A little,” said Mr. Barker.

“Then you know,” replied Mr. Summers, “how one’s mind is fixed on the date appointed for the examination; how eagerly we seek for information as to the questions usually asked; with what care and diligence we prepare ourselves; and how interested we are in learning the disposition of the examiner and any other details we can get hold of about the ordeal.”

“And how glad we felt when it was all over,” said Mr. Barker, with a smile.

“Well,” continued Mr. Summers, “if an examination on which comparatively little depended was regarded with so much earnestness and anxious thought, how ought we to regard the examination in which our earthly life will be reviewed, to see if we have mastered the course of lessons assigned us here, and whether we are fitted to go up into the higher education of heaven!”

“I am sure we don’t think enough of the matter,” said Mr. Rogers. “Partly because we don’t understand it clearly.”

“Then let us see what we can learn,” said Mr. Summers, “about the great examination we are all entered for, which none of us can decline, in which we must appear and answer for ourselves, whether prepared or not. Let us see what the questions will be, who the examiner is, if any assistance can be had in the examination, when it will be held, and where. Let us see what the examination will deal with, what will be the rewards, and what the penalty of failure.”