

The 1858 Great Controversy Chapters 19-21.

Chapter 19. Death, Not Eternal Life in Misery.

Satan commenced his deception in Eden. He said to Eve, Thou shalt not surely die. This was Satan's first lesson upon the immortality of the soul; and he has carried on this deception from that time to the present, and will carry it on until the captivity of God's children shall be turned. I was pointed to Adam and Eve in Eden. They partook of the forbidden tree, and then the flaming sword was placed around the tree of life, and they were driven from the Garden, lest they should partake of the tree of life, and be immortal sinners. The tree of life was to perpetuate immortality. I heard an angel ask, Who of the family of Adam have passed that flaming sword, and have partaken of the tree of life? I heard another angel answer, Not one of the family of Adam have passed that flaming sword, and partaken of that tree; therefore there is not an immortal sinner. The soul that sinneth it shall die an everlasting death; a death that will last forever, where there will be no hope of a resurrection; and then the wrath of God will be appeased.

It was a marvel to me that Satan could succeed so well in making men believe that the words of God, The soul that sinneth it shall die, mean that the soul that sinneth it shall not die, but live eternally in misery. Said the angel, Life is life, whether it is in pain or happiness. Death is without pain, without joy, without hatred.

Satan told his angels to make a special effort to spread the deception and lie first repeated to Eve in Eden, Thou shalt not surely die. And as the error was received by the people, and they believed that man was immortal, Satan led them still further to believe that the sinner would live in eternal misery. Then the way was prepared for Satan to work through his representatives, and hold up God before the people as a revengeful tyrant; that those who do not please him, he will plunge into hell, and cause them ever to feel his wrath; and that they will suffer unutterable anguish, while he will look down upon them with satisfaction, as they writhe in horrible sufferings and eternal flames.

Satan knew that if this error should be received, God would be dreaded and hated by very many, instead of being loved and admired; and that many would be led to believe that the threatenings of God's word would not be literally fulfilled; for it would be against his character of benevolence and love, to plunge beings whom he had created into eternal torments. Satan has led them to another extreme, to entirely overlook the justice of God, and the threatenings in his Word, and represent him as being all mercy, and that not one will perish, but all, both saint and sinner, will at last be saved in his kingdom. In consequence of the popular error of the immortality of the soul, and endless misery, Satan takes advantage of another class, and leads them on to regard the Bible as an uninspired book. They think it teaches many good things; but they cannot rely upon it and love it; because they have been taught that it declares the doctrine of eternal misery.

Satan takes advantage of still another class, and leads them still further to deny the existence of God. They can see no consistency in the character of the God of the Bible, if he will torment a portion of the human family to all eternity in horrible tortures; and they deny the Bible and its Author, and regard death as an eternal sleep.

Then Satan leads another class who are fearful and timid to commit sin; and after they have sinned, he holds up before them that the wages of sin is (not death, but) an eternal life in horrible torments, to be endured through the endless ages of eternity. Satan improves the opportunity, and magnifies before their feeble minds the horrors of an endless hell, and takes charge of their minds, and they lose their reason. Then Satan and his angels exult, and the infidel and atheist join in casting reproach upon christianity. They regard these evil consequences of the reception of popular heresy, as the natural results of believing in the Bible and its Author.

I saw that the heavenly host was filled with indignation at this bold work of Satan. I inquired why all these delusions should be suffered to take effect upon the minds of men, when the angels of God were powerful, and if commissioned, could easily break the enemy's power. Then I saw that God knew that Satan would try every art to destroy man; therefore he had caused his Word to be written out, and had made his designs to man so plain that the weakest need not err. Then, after he had given his Word to man, he had carefully preserved it, so that Satan and his angels, through any agent or representative, could not destroy it. While other books might be destroyed, this holy Book was to be immortal. And down near the close of time, when the delusions of Satan should increase, the copies of this Book were to be so multiplied, that all who desired it might have a copy of God's revealed will to man, and, if they would, might arm themselves against the deceptions and lying wonders of Satan.

I saw that God had especially guarded the Bible, yet learned men, when the copies were few, had changed the words in some instances, thinking that they were making it more plain, when they were mystifying that which was plain, in causing it to lean to their established views, governed by tradition. But I saw that the word of God, as a whole, is a perfect chain, one portion of scripture explaining another. True seekers for truth need not err; for not only is the word of God plain and simple in declaring the way to life, but the Holy Spirit is given to guide in understanding the way of life revealed in his Word.

I saw that the angels of God were never to control the will. God sets before man life and death. He can have his choice. Many desire life, but continue to walk in the broad road, because they have not chosen life.

I saw the mercy and compassion of God in giving his Son to die for guilty man. Those who will not choose to accept salvation which has been so dearly purchased for them, must be punished. Beings whom God created have chosen to rebel against his government; but I saw that God did not shut them up in hell to endure endless misery. He could not take them to heaven; for to bring them into the company of the pure and holy would make them perfectly miserable. God will not take them to heaven, neither will he cause them to suffer eternally. He will destroy them utterly, and cause them to be as though they had not been, and then his justice will be satisfied. He formed man out of the dust of the earth, and the disobedient and unholy will be consumed by fire, and return to dust again. I saw that the benevolence and compassion of God in this, should lead all to admire his character, and to adore him; and after the wicked shall be destroyed from off the earth, all the heavenly host will say, Amen!

Satan looked with great satisfaction upon those who professed the name of Christ, and were closely adhering to these delusions formed by himself. His work is to still form new delusions. His power increases, and he grows more artful. He led on his representatives, the popes and the priests, to exalt themselves, and to stir up the people to bitterly persecute those who loved God, and were not willing to yield to his delusions, introduced through them. Satan moved upon his agents to destroy Christ's

devoted followers. O the sufferings and agony, which they made the precious of God to endure! Angels have kept a faithful record of it all. But Satan and his evil angels exulted, and told the angels who administered to, and strengthened those suffering saints, that they would kill them, so that there would not be left a true Christian upon the earth. I saw that the church of God was then pure. There was no danger of men with corrupt hearts coming into the church of God then; for the true Christian, who dared to declare his faith, was in danger of the rack, the stake, and every torture which Satan and his evil angels could invent, and put into the mind of man.

Chapter 20. The Reformation.

But notwithstanding all the persecution and the putting to death of the saints, yet living witnesses were raised up on every hand. The angels of God were doing the work committed to their trust. They were searching in the darkest places, and were selecting out of the darkness, men who were honest at heart. They were all buried up in error, yet God selected them as he did Saul, as chosen vessels to bear his truth, and raise their voices against the sins of his professed people.

The angels of God moved upon Martin Luther, Melancthon, and others in different places, to thirst for the living testimony of the word of God. The enemy had come in like a flood, and the standard must be raised up against him. Luther was chosen to breast the storm, and stand up against the ire of a fallen church, and strengthen the few who were faithful to their holy profession. He was ever fearful of offending God. He tried through works to obtain the favor of God; but he was not satisfied until a gleam of light from heaven drove the darkness from his mind, and led him to trust, not in works, but in the merits of the blood of Christ; and to come to God for himself, not through popes nor confessors, but through Jesus Christ alone. O how precious was this knowledge to Luther! He prized this new and precious light which had dawned upon his dark understanding, and had driven away his superstition, higher than the richest earthly treasure. The word of God was new. Every thing was changed. The Book he had dreaded because he could not see beauty in it, was life, Life to him. It was his joy, his consolation, his blessed teacher. Nothing could induce him to leave its study.

He had feared death; but as he read the word of God, all his terrors disappeared, and he admired the character of God, and loved him. He searched the word of God for himself. He feasted upon the rich treasures it contained, and then he searched it for the church. He was disgusted with the sins of those in whom he had trusted for salvation. He saw very many enshrouded in the same darkness which had covered him. He anxiously sought an opportunity to point them to the Lamb of God, who alone taketh away the sin of the world. He raised his voice against the errors and sins of the Papal church, and earnestly longed to break the chain of darkness which was confining thousands, and causing them to trust in works for salvation.

He longed to be enabled to open to their minds the true riches of the grace of God, and the excellence of salvation obtained through Jesus Christ. He raised his voice zealously, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, cried against the existing sins of the leaders of the church; and as he met the storm of opposition from the priests, his courage did not fail; for he firmly relied upon the strong arm of God, and confidently trusted in him for victory. And as he pushed the battle closer and closer, the rage of the priests was kindled against him. They did not wish to be reformed. They chose to be left in ease, in wanton pleasure, in wickedness. They wished the church kept in darkness.

I saw that Luther was ardent and zealous, fearless and bold in reproofing sin, and advocating the truth. He cared not for wicked men and devils. He knew that he had One with him mightier than they all.

Luther possessed fire, zeal, courage and boldness, and at times might go too far; but God raised up Melancthon, who was just the opposite in character, to aid Luther, and carry on the work of reformation. Melancthon was timid, fearful, cautious, and possessed great patience. He was greatly beloved of God. His knowledge was great in the Scriptures, and his judgment and wisdom was excellent. His love for the cause of God was equal to Luther's. These hearts, the Lord knit together; they were friends which were never to be separated. Luther was a great help to Melancthon when he was in danger of being fearful and slow, and Melancthon was also a great help to Luther to keep him from moving too fast. Melancthon's far-seeing cautiousness often averted trouble which would have come upon the cause, if the work had been left alone to Luther; and the work would often have failed in being pushed forward, if it had been left to Melancthon alone. I was shown the wisdom of God in choosing these two men, of different characters to carry on the work of reformation. {1SG 122.1}

I was then carried back to the days of the apostles, and saw that God chose as companions an ardent and zealous Peter, and a mild, patient, meek John. Sometimes Peter was impetuous. And the beloved disciple often checked Peter, when his zeal and ardor led him too far; but it did not reform him. But after Peter had denied his Lord, and repented, and was converted, all he needed was a mild caution from John to check his ardor and zeal. The cause of Christ would often have suffered had it been left alone to John. Peter's zeal was needed. His boldness and energy often delivered them from difficulty, and silenced their enemies. John was winning. He gained many to the cause of Christ by his patient forbearance, and deep devotedness.

God raised up men to cry against the existing sins of the Papal church, and carry forward the reformation. Satan sought to destroy these living witnesses; but God made a hedge about them. Some, for the glory of his name, were permitted to seal the testimony they had borne with their blood; but there were other powerful men, like Luther and Melancthon, who could best glorify God by living and crying aloud against the sins of popes, priests and kings. They trembled before the voice of Luther. Through those chosen men, rays of light began to scatter the darkness, and very many joyfully received the light and walked in it. And when one witness was slain, two or more were raised up to fill his place.

But Satan was not satisfied. He could only have power over the body. He could not make believers yield their faith and hope. And even in death they triumphed with a bright hope of immortality at the resurrection of the just. They had more than mortal energy. They dared not sleep for a moment. They kept the christian armor girded about them, prepared for a conflict, not merely with spiritual foes, but with Satan in the form of men, whose constant cry was, Give up your faith, or die. Those few Christians were strong in God, and more precious in his sight than half a world bearing the name of Christ; yet cowards in his cause. While the church was persecuted, they were united and loving. They were strong in God. Sinners were not permitted to unite themselves with it; neither the deceiver nor the deceived. Those only who were willing to forsake all for Christ could be his disciples. They loved to be poor, humble and Christ-like.

Chapter 21. The Church and World United.

Satan then consulted with his angels, and they there considered what they had gained. It was true that they had kept some timid souls through fear of death, from embracing the truth; but many, even of the most timid, received the truth, and immediately their fears and timidity left them, and as they witnessed the death of their brethren, and saw their firmness and patience, they knew that God and angels assisted them to endure such sufferings, and they grew bold and fearless. And when called to

yield their own lives, they maintained their faith with such patience and firmness as caused even their murderers to tremble. Satan and his angels decided that there was a more successful way to destroy souls, and more certain in the end. They saw that although they caused Christians to suffer, their steadfastness, and the bright hope that cheered them, caused the weakest to grow strong, and that the rack and the flames could not daunt them. They imitated the noble bearing of Christ when before his murderers, and many were convinced of the truth by witnessing their constancy, and the glory of God which rested upon them.

Satan decided that he must come in a milder form. He had corrupted the doctrines of the Bible; and traditions which were to ruin millions were taking deep root. He restrained his hate, and decided not to urge on his subjects to such bitter persecution; but lead on the church to contend, not for the faith once delivered to the saints, but, for various traditions. As he led on the church to receive favors and honors of the world, under the false pretense of benefiting them, she began to lose favor with God. Gradually the church lost her power, as she shunned to declare the straight truths which shut out the lovers of pleasure and friends of the world.

The church is not the separate and peculiar people she was when the fires of persecution were kindled against her. How is the gold become dim? How is the most fine gold changed? I saw that if the church had always retained her holy and peculiar character, the power of the Holy Spirit which was imparted to the disciples would be with her. The sick would be healed, devils would be rebuked and cast out, and she would be mighty, and a terror to her enemies.

I saw that a very large company professed the name of Christ, but God does not recognize them as his. He has no pleasure in them. Satan seemed to assume a religious character, and was very willing that the people should think they were Christians. He was very willing that they should believe in Jesus, his crucifixion, and his resurrection. Satan and his angels fully believed all this themselves, and trembled. But if this faith does not provoke to good works, and lead those who profess it to imitate the self-denying life of Christ, he is not disturbed; for they merely assume the Christian name, while their hearts are still carnal; and he can use them in his service better than if they made no profession. Under the name of Christian they hide their deformity.

They pass along with their unsanctified natures, and their evil passions unsubdued. This gives occasion for the unbeliever to throw their imperfections in the face of Jesus Christ, to reproach him, and to cause those who do possess pure and undefiled religion to be brought into disrepute.

The ministers preach smooth things to suit carnal professors. This is just as Satan would have it. They dare not preach Jesus and the cutting truths of the Bible; for if they should, these carnal professors would not hear them. Many of them are wealthy, and must be retained in the church, although they are no more fit to be there than Satan and his angels. The religion of Jesus is made to appear popular and honorable in the eyes of the world. The people are told that those who profess religion will be more honored by the world. Very widely do such teachings differ from the teachings of Christ. His doctrine and the world could not be at peace. Those who followed him had to renounce the world.

These smooth things originated with Satan and his angels. They formed the plan, and nominal professors have carried it out. Hypocrites and sinners unite with the church. Pleasing fables are taught, and readily received. But if the truth should be preached in its purity, it would soon shut out hypocrites and sinners. But there is no difference between the professed followers of Christ and the world. I saw that if the false covering could be torn off from the members of the churches, there would be revealed such iniquity, vileness and corruption, that the most diffident child of God would have no hesitancy in

calling them by their right name, children of their father, the Devil; for his works they do. Jesus and all the heavenly host looked with disgust upon the scene; yet God had a message for the church that was sacred and important. If received, it would make a thorough reformation in the church, revive the living testimony that would purge out hypocrites and sinners, and bring the church again into favor with God.