

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL & DOLPH SKINNER
UNIVERSAL SALVATION OR ENDLESS MISERY

by **David Lee Burris**

MIR. CAMPBELL TO MR. SKINNER. LETTER XL.

Bethany, Va., July 3, 1839.

Mr. Skinner:— Sir—I only design, in my concluding epistle, **a condensed recapitulation and review.**

This controversy originated with your party. My - place throughout has been that of a respondent. You commenced: I close. You have had all the advantages you asked. You solicited a written rather than an oral discussion. You led the way. You selected four propositions. You asked for twenty letters, of six octavo pages each, and then finally you asked for your last letter extended. To all these demands I consented, letter 6, paragraph 6.

I chose the affirmative of two; the first of which was, "Sheol, hades and Gehenna, are sometimes used to denote a future state of misery or of punishment."* You conceded this. I gained two points by concession: 1st. that Gehenna, doesn't simply mean guilt, repentance, or present anguish of any sort: therefore present pain or agony does not absorb the full meaning of hell, and is not the proper punishment of sin.

That inasmuch as hell sometimes denotes punishment after death, the nature and extent of that punishment, if not clearly indicated by the term itself, may be learned from the adjectives connected with that word, or from the terms substituted for it in the sacred style.

This makes the discussion of a lion and amnion, generally rendered everlasting, interesting. But your having associated Gehenna with words of a different class, and confounded it with them, obliged me to make it the subject of special investigation.

In the New Testament the word hell does positively denote endless punishment-. I showed by a full induction of all its occurrences in that volume, that, in the lips of Jesus and his apostles, it did undoubtedly denote a place or state of endless punishment. **Here your plea and defence was, that it was anciently among Jews the name of a place of temporal and limited punishment—the vale of Hinnom;** and therefore couldn't possibly mean in the New Testament a place of interminable.

You, indeed, wounded your defence by conceding that generally, if not universally in the New Testament, it is not used in its original and-literal, but in a figurative sense. But **which fully annihilated your argument was the fact, that all the words used in the New Testament to express the endless bliss of the righteous souls, were in the Old Testament and originally, like Gehenna or hell, applied to temporal places and things.** Such was Shem, translated Heaven, Jerusalem, Mount Zion, Paradise, etc. Heaven originally denoted the air. Thus, the fowls of heaven, fowls of the air, that fly in the midst of heaven, or in the air. Paradise denoted the delightful, but transient abode of primitive man. Jerusalem, Mount Zion, represented earthly cities.

Our argument from these incontrovertible facts, then, was . . . If these words, originally literally indicative of earthly and temporal glory and bliss, came in the New Testament to be the types and names of future and endless glory and felicity, why should it be objected that Gehenna, or prophet, or hell-fire did originally mean earthly and temporal punishment; and for that reason cannot mean in the New Testament endless punishment?

Here it was demonstrated that if your logic was good against hell, it was equally good against heaven—that it equally annihilated the eternity of both. This plain argument you never attempted to dispose of—indeed, it never was disposed of, and never can be by any man.

But we supported our affirmative concerning Gehenna by positive and direct proofs. We exhibited its substitutes and contrasts, as taken from the lips of Jesus. These stereotyped its meaning.

For the word hell, as its fair equivalent he substitutes the words "everlasting fire." Matt. xviii: 8, 9. "Being cast into hell," he explains by going into the "fire that shall never be quenched." He does this three times in one discourse. Mark ix: 43-48. Again, he contrasts "entering into life," with being "cast into hell." Matt. x: 28; xviii: 8, 9; Mark ix: 43; and "entering into the kingdom of God with one eye," he contrasts with being "cast into hell with two eyes, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

Your defence here bordered on the ridiculous. When I quoted the words, "Fear him who, when he has killed the body, has power to destroy both soul and body in hell," you said it meant, "Fear Caesar, who has power to destroy you in the siege of Jerusalem,"* or there unto equivalent; and "entering into life" you said was "joining the church." But your courage finally failed to defend these alternatives—as being too preposterous for even your own sense of ridiculous.

Thus my affirmation that the term Gehenna, or hell, in the New Covenant, does certainly mean a state of endless punishment, is fully sustained and stands in unbroken strength after you have discharged your whole artillery against it. The first proposition sustained, the controversy was legitimately closed, so far as the truth of your entire system is concerned. For if it be proved hell in the New Testament means "endless punishment," where "both soul and body after death are destroyed;" and if it be proved that the wicked shall be cast into it, all the sons of Adam will never by any other arguments, erase from the Christian religion endless destruction for the wicked.

Still you would have me prove it a second time, and gave me the next proposition: "All the force of the Hebrew *olem* is transferred into the Greek *aiōn*, and into the adjective *aionios*; which words, when they are applied to the future state of both the righteous and wicked, does denote duration without end." You concurred with me that *aionios* had in it the full force of *olem* and *aion*, and was almost universally translated forever, eternal, everlasting, etc.

You also admitted that when applied to future bliss of the righteous, it indicated without end; but denied that it had the same meaning when applied to the misery of the wicked.

My first argument, and it certainly is a common sense argument, was—That everlasting, when in the same breath and by the same speaker, it was applied to the future bliss of the righteous, and to future misery of the wicked, must in all honesty and fair dealing, mean the same thing.

To escape from the force of this most palpable argument, you were obliged to take new ground, to assume, that the word has no certain meaning in itself, but derives all its sense from the word with which it is connected. You made it a perfect cipher.* Thus, you make hell depend upon eternal, and eternal upon hell for their meaning! — Neither of them alone mean anything certain: but when together, you assume, they mean temporal punishment!

By various elaborate inductions, we showed that by every law and custom of language, this word did clearly express "being without end"—"always being." But when used in reference to mundane things, as it often is, it must be used figuratively and indefinitely. And when applied to a spiritual and future state, it must be taken in its natural full import. Thus, it is applied to God, when his simple and perpetual existence is spoken of. It is also applied to his glory and praise with regard to continuity, and to the future bliss of the righteous.

Now, in reference to mundane things, are uniform in interpretation: we always use the word as indicative of some indefinite long time. And in reference to a future and a spiritual state, we are equally uniform in always using the term as indicative of endless duration. Such is the oracle of reason, as well as the laws of interpretation. But you violate these principles by making it, in reference to the same state or dispensation, mean two different things. For example, there is in reference to one spiritual state, "an everlasting covenant" of the "everlasting God," an "everlasting righteousness, redemption, inheritance," "everlasting life," and an "everlasting punishment" -

Always expressed by the same word in all languages. Now to make it six times out of seven occurrences, in relation to the same institution, mean endless and once ending, is what we call absolute tyranny and despotism, according to all laws and canons of interpreting language. This is your presumptuous position in this branch of the controversy.

When asked, Does the word ever mean endless - you answer, Yes; but then you say, "the subject fixes the meaning to the word, and not the word to the subject." But when asked, What better than accompanying epithet fixes meaning of the subject you give no answer. You make the substantive explain the adjective, and then make it explain itself.*

Singular positions require singular rules and laws of evidence and **proof 8**. The sum of my argument on these words I now quote from letter 14, par graph 23:—" The words *aion, aionios*, occur in the Old Greek and New Testament some hundred eighteen times; of which extraordinary sum they are properly and literally translated in the common version, five hundred eight times by the strongest terms in human speech indicative of endless duration—such as " eternal," "everlasting," "forever;" and, in the judgment of the most numerous and learned critics, might as well in many of the others have been as literally translated by the same words.

Then look, in the second place, at the special fact: These said terms occur in the New Testament alone, referring to the continuance of the happiness of the righteous, sixty-one times; and to continuance of the punishment of the wicked fifteen times, translated "eternal," "everlasting," "forever." Now, from the general fact, and this still more striking special fact, I emphatically, and with intense interest, demand why—for, what reason—by what law of language or canon of criticism, shall the duration of the happiness of the righteous and of the misery of the wicked be as different as time and eternity, when they are thus so often, and in such various circumstances set forth, by the very same words! On an answer to this question must always hang the fate of Universalism, so far as meaning of these words' concerned."

Again, paragraph 25, "To sum up this branch of the argument—we have from your own display of aerie, always, and on, being, shown that no word, logically or radically, can more naturally signify endless being or endless duration. That ever, forever, evermore and eternal, are its most common versions in both Testaments. You have examined the New, and conceded this. I have examined both Old and New, and if it is disputed I will reinforce it; but I think you will not demand this. When it's applied to God's being, you admit it means endless. Also, when applied to his glory, it means duration without end. Also, when applied to the praises to be offered to him. And you admit that when it is applied to the future happiness of the righteous, it means endless. Now for your reasons why it signifies a limited time, an ending period, when expressive of continuance of the punishment of the wicked."

Your escape from this I shall now give in your own words, letter 15 "We are not in dispute whether *aion* and *aionios* are ever used to signify endless duration. I not only concede, but argue, that when applied to God and his perfections, they necessarily have to have this meaning—and that from the very nature of the subject. And were you to find them 6000 instead of 600 times, in their various forms and flexions, in the Old and New Testament, and out of that number 5900 times applied to his perfections; yet if, in the hundred, they were applied to a variety of things of short duration, and which from their nature could not be endless, you would not have gained one step towards establishing endless punishment from the force of them, unless you proved by something else that punishment must be endless."

The conclusion of your philological labors then, is, that we must prove punishment to be endless by something else than language: for you admit that language cannot do it.* Why, then, may we not ask, have you selected three propositions about words, when the words of inspiration cannot settle!

Your a priori views of what is fitting the Deity, disprove all inspired language can express in its clearest, most definite, and precise terms and phrases.* Having assumed the absurd position language could not prove punishment to be everlasting, because there is not one word in the universe always means the same thing; asserting also that though we proved avionics to mean duration without end sixty times for once it was used indefinitely, it availed nothing, since it was not always so used; therefore something other than the import of substantives or adjectives must prove it: I say, notwithstanding all this, you proceed to your **third proposition, and affirm that " there is a word in human language that signifies duration without end never applied to the future punishment of the wicked;"** nor to the righteous, you might have said. *

Another error. See letter 1, paragraphs 10-20 inclusive, and letter "D. S. 11. This is at first view rather a startling proposition to some of the Universalists, inasmuch as it is admitted on all hands—by Turk, Jew, Christian, Infidel, Universalist and all—that the belief of eternal punishment pervaded the human race before the Christian era, and contemporary with it. **Now if the Saviour and if his apostles were Universalists, they were not unwise in throwing away their lives for nothing, inasmuch as God could in his very nature but save all his creatures without their martyrdom:** I say, they weren't only foolishly prodigal of suffering and of life, but they are censurable for not using the unambiguous terms in disabusing the world of "Particularism;" which they did not, if the third proposition be true: for it seems there was at least one word that denoted duration without end, which they never used to indicate the future state of righteous or wicked; thus, leaving the matter at least ambiguous, if the other words used by them did not unequivocally decide its character. But they didn't on the hypothesis before us; for if you admit that words often associated with future punishment indicate endless duration; which words, as honest men, they ought on no account to have used, when opposing an error so universal as the nature of endless misery in that age.—

There are words in the language that clearly indicate those things temporal; and certainly if eternal was inapplicable to punishment, they could, as they should, have found the term temporal or the equivalent, and always applied it to the future punishment of the wicked.

It was, however, on this proposition that you proved to all men your profound ignorance of the language in which you were acting the critic. Your gross mistakes and blunders showed that when burden of the proof lay on you, you sometimes did not know what was for or against your own side: for when your argument was summed up, it was unequivocal confirmation of my proof of the second position.*

It is a fact, which all the learned world, without a single exception, will admit—that Mr. Skinner, in his dissertations upon acidify, etc., did, without intending or knowing it, prove my propositions, and disprove his own; boastingly affirming that he had found a word which did signify duration without end.

Another error. See letter 19, paragraph 14, letter 21, paragraphs 11--13, letter 39, paragraphs 16, 17. U.S. which word in its true etymological meaning and construction, was identical with that very word in my second proposition * which himself had immediately before declared did not absolutely mean duration without end. The recklessness of truth in this instance was much more to be regretted than the fatal blunder itself—in affirming that the root of the one word implied limited and that of the other endless duration; while, in truth, both words had the same identical root.*

So Kenneth the debate on the three first propositions. To quote my words on that occasion, letter 20, [paragraph 15—" You have now finished the controversy on the philology of Universalism, as I before said in favor of the truth, far beyond all that I expected. You have said that *aidios* is that word which signifies absolute endless duration; that had it been prefixed to punishment it would have made it absolutely endless and interminable. In thus deciding you have refuted yourself and all your efforts to explain away both *aei* and *aeion*.]

Branches from the same root. You have, then, Sir, sustained my proof of the first two propositions, by sealing my facts and seasonings upon those long disputed words: and you have in another way established all my positions in contending for the absolute eternity indicated by this word; for it is applied to the punishment of the wicked* and to God, and to nothing else in the Bible." We have theft, in one word, shown that the proof of the third proposition is a corroboration of my proof of the second — you demonstrating that aerie found in composition, whether in avionics, adios, or or eternal, means endless in its fullest import.* This unexpected favor, however, not being in your intention, but in the fact and result of your criticism, entitles you not to our thanks.

The main proposition, the jet of the whole controversy, is your fourth. You affirm that "eternal life" (meaning holiness & happiness) "shall be the ultimate destiny of all mankind." This, of course, was to be proved not a priori, not by far-fetched inference, but from Bible statements.

1st. **You did not quote one text which affirmed the ultimate holiness of all mankind.** * Another error. See letter 19, paragraph 14, letter 21, paragraph* 11-13, letter.39, paragraphs 16, 17. But you did cite sundry passages pertaining to the Messiah's kingdom, its extension and its comprehension, its temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings; from which you first inferred the individual salvation, and next inferred the individual holiness of all men. From such texts as, "All souls are mine,"—" I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance,"—" Look unto me and be saved, all ends of the earth,"—" He will draw all men to him," —you infer eternal life as the portion of every human being. But inasmuch as the question about the final end of all flesh was not the point before any of the writers you quote, your application of their words beyond their intention is a downright misapplication and perversion.

In exposing this presumptuous daring, my method was first—to give the direct testimony of Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Baptist, the four Evangelists, Paul, Peter, James, Jude, and the Lord Jesus declaring that it should not finally "be with the wicked as with the righteous :"—that the end of all wicked men is destruction—" whose End is destruction"—" everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power that "a much sorer punishment than death awaited them who disobeyed the Lord" — "of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who has despised" Christ's salvation.

In the second place, we showed that it was contrary to the style of the New Testament:—that that volume declares "it is appointed to men once to die; but after this the judgment"—that "God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world by Jesus Christ righteously :"—that he will "render to every man according to his works" —"to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, immortality, he will bestow eternal life;" and "to those who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, he will award indignation and wrath"—nay, that he will dispense "tribulation and anguish to every soul of man that doth evil"—" in the day" when "all shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ"— "when he will judge the secrets of all men according to Paul's Gospel:"—that after this judgment, he that's found "unjust, unrighteous, or unholy, shall be so still:"—that "those only whose names are in the book of life shall enter the holy eternal city :"—that "without that city there are dogs, sorcerers, liars, murderers," etc.—that "they have right to the tree of life, and shall enter the gates of the city"—"who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? etc. **From all of such sayings, of which there are innumerable hosts, two ultimate and opposites fates are as certainly allotted to men, as there are two sorts of men in this world.**

In the third place, we challenged you, time after time, to select only one verse of all your alleged proofs, and form a close and logical issue upon it. But you declined it to the last letter* You could give scores, you said: but would not give one.*

'We, in the fourth place, alleged texts on which we would rest the whole matter; but you would not meet us on these. For instance: One verse on which we laid the greatest emphasis—a verse, too, which alone overcame all the doubts of one of the most learned of German Divines, and silenced all his skepticism, was never so much as noticed by you. You had the caution to pass it in profound silence. It is this: "The sin against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness, neither in this world nor in that which is to come—neither in the present nor future state."— In all your daring assertions, you had the prudence to let this pass unnoticed.

We showed also, in the fifth place, there are three distinct salvations stated in the sacred writings:— 1st. That of the body from temporal evils; in which sense "God is the saviour of all men." That of the soul from sin: " Who hath saved us and called us"—"He hath saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit," etc. That there will be a future salvation of the whole human personage: "Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed"—" The day is at hand"—" He will appear a second time to their salvation that look for him." To this you paid no attention; but continued to apply the word without any regard to this important fact; and thus, despite of these palpable facts and differences you apply to the last whatever is said of the first or of the second salvation. commands; for they shall *

Another error—see letter 35, paragraph 11: letter 37, paragraph* S-20. D. S. t See letter 39, paragraph 4. D. S. 19. Meanwhile, you thought it more expedient to give us theological dissertations on the Divine perfections, than to rely upon direct quotations. The sum of these dissertations was—that, according to your optics and notions of what became the Ruler of the universe, it would be out of the question to punish sin with an endless punishment :—that, to perpetuate misery in his dominions was most abhorrent to your notions of benevolence, mercy, justice, etc. It was also equally dishonorable to the wisdom and power of God, whose wisdom is omniscience and whose power is omnipotence to permit such a state of things continue long.

Such was the point and burthen of several of your letters. To which it was replied —

1st. That **all arguments drawn from the Divine perfections, from the wisdom, power, goodness, justice, mercy, etc., of God, in favor of the necessity of an ultimate termination of sin and suffering, would equally have forbid the possibility of its existence at all:** for if the Divine perfections must bring it to an end, they ought never to have suffered it to commence; for prevention is altogether wiser and more benevolent than cure.

Your hypothetical seasonings on the Divine perfections are perfectly refuted by the fact that moral evil and physical pain are as old as this creation; and if God is immutable in all his perfections, or as human reason knows, it may be compatible with the Divine-perfections to permit the continuance of it to a period indefinite as eternity itself. God was righteous, merciful, and kind—as wise and powerful the day that sin and sorrow were born, as he is now, or ever will be. It is thus preposterous to argue from speculative views 'of Divine perfections against what the Scriptures affirm—against what God may, or may not do, in reference to sin and sinners. What he has done and is now doing is a specimen of what may be done under his wise benevolent administration, our speculations to the contrary notwithstanding.

But, in the second place, as persons standing upon the circumference of a circle, some 90 or 100 degrees apart, will contemplate a central column in a different light, if not under a different angle; so I, from my views of Divine perfections, arrive at conclusions very contrary to yours.

Moral evil there is—pain and misery there are. These are facts. To put them down, and prevent their recurrence, we are sure is within the designs of Divine benevolence. But we see Divine benevolence fails herein innumerable instances. The Gospel itself becomes a savor of condemnation to the lost. The most hardened wretches are found sitting under the very offer of holiness and eternal life.

Now you admit that these miscreants would torment any pure society in the universe. Well, "they die in their sins." Now, to treat them as the pure in heart, and to receive them into Abraham's bosom as they are we have showed would be supremely cruel and unmerciful. Every Divine attribute requires their separation—their punishment. Here, then, your theology was showed to be as fallacious as your philology.

In this dilemma you bethought yourself of a third region, and a new dispensation; and not finding, like many Universalists, a Saviour in death, a purgatorial efficacy in the act of dying, you discovered an intermediate prison, or purgatorial institution for the disembodied spirits—not for men, but for the spirits of men. In this poetic region, hell fire, or Gehenna punishment, becomes the sanctifying agency; and those whom the tears and the blood of Christ on earth assailed in vain, are cured by fire and brimstone*

Having made this splendid discovery, scarcely had you descended from your Pegasus, returning from this Limbo atrium, than the earth-borns troubled you with many hard questions. To relieve them you set about the institution of a new system of philosophy founded upon your theological dissertations, and **a new theory of man.**

The principle points in the new philosophy, as we exposed them are:

That after death punishment is, of all means of grace, the most effectual and irresistible,* It is, indeed, omnipotent and irresistible grace: for it saves all the hardened wretches that the love of God and grace of Christ have assailed in vain. All punishments are only grace in the form of chastisement for the exclusive benefit of the chastised. All inhabitants of "Hell fire punishment," or this purgatorial prison, cease sinning the moment incarcerated, or else they never could be discharged.* "God punishes every sinner accord to the full demerit of his sins," and then the prison doors are opened.

Sin is finite in all its consequences and cannot require punishment infinite in duration; The same law that condemns will also justify the same person; and, finally punishment will destroy itself.*

In reply to this philosophy I pursued the reduction to an absurdity plan—demonstrating that, according to its first point, Christ had died in vain: personal chastisement atones for sin, sanctifies the sinner, and sufficiently honors the Divine government. Of course, you substitute personal sufferings for Christ's life, death, and resurrection—and for the whole work of the Holy Spirit and in lieu of the whole remedial economy, called the Church of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven, and give transcendent honors to your Purgatory system as saving all its subjects! This, then, stultifies and nullifies the Gospel of Christ.

Your second point assumes that God cannot punish sin—he can only chastise it into holiness! Nothing is due to the law of God, or to his own dignity, or that of his government, after sin is chastised into holiness!!

Your third point represents God as punishing those who are holy; for they have all ceased sinning in thought, word, and deed, the moment they enter your temporal Hell: for if they didn't, the debt never could be paid, and they could never get out!!

Your fourth point deprives God of the power of forgiving sin, or of showing mercy to sinners. When all can pay their own debts, who can forgive them? and therefore none of your hell-fire converts can ever praise the Lamb of God or join the song of Heaven. They burned their robes bright in the flames of Prophet, rather than washed them white in the blood of the Lamb. They admire indignant justice punishing them into purity and innocence, sing not the praises of Mercy or sin-forgiving Grace!!

The greater the sinner, the greater the saint; the severer the pains of Purgatory, the more the bliss of heaven; longer the passage through, the more rest at the end!! The sinner suffers for himself and puts away his own sins by his own sorrows.

Your fifth point makes both the punishment and the chastisement of sin absurd: for it is not infinite in its consequences; therefore it would of itself come to an end in every case.

Adam would have returned to Paradise, and Abel to life, and Cain to holiness, if let alone; because sin is not endless in effects or infinite in its consequences!!

Your sixth point makes a person righteous and wicked by the same law: Obedience is righteousness—transgression, unrighteousness. The same law in both cases. Now if those who go into your prison guilty and condemned, come out innocent and just by law, is it not demonstrable that the broken law has been mended at the time the sinner was made just?

You give to the sinner, therefore, the power of mending the law as well as himself, or of giving to God's law the power of justifying the same person whom it had condemned !—and finally you make the effect not only annihilate its own cause, the creature extinguish its Creator, punishment destroy sin; but you make punishment kill itself. The viper bites itself and dies. The fire goes out because the fuel is all consumed.

Your system is that of a circle; and your logic follows it. **You prove your philology by your theology; your theology by your philosophy.** Your grand assumption is that endless punishment is unnecessary. As though your eye pierced through all the infinities of the universe, you affirm that certain reasons may justify temporal punishments, no reasons can justify eternal punishment.

We choose to love God because he first loved us, rather than to have to love him because he has first tormented us.

You hazard an immense responsibility and condemnation, if we are right. For ten thousands worlds I would not take your chance! You are hourly weakening the threatenings and the promises of God, and the motives to prompt and constant obedience. "Knowing the terrors of the Lord"—" that we must all stand before the tribunal of Christ, to receive in our bodies what we have done, good or bad."

Alexander Campbell. A discussion of the doctrines of the endless misery and universal salvation: in an epistolary correspondence (Kindle Locations 8328-8632). C. C. P. Grosh. Kindle Edition.

March 4, 1866
At 11:45 P.M
Campbell Finishes
His Course

On his death bed Campbell asked:

- ❖ "What think ye of Christ?
- ❖ Of His divine nature?
- ❖ Of His glorious mission?"



March 4, 1866
At 11:45 P.M
Campbell Finishes
His Course

His Selina Comforted Him With
"The Blessed Savior Will Go With
You Through The Valley Of The
Shadow Of Death." He replied:
"That He Will! That He Will!"
These Were His Last Words.



