

# **What Christ Teaches Concerning Future Punishment**

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## **Foreword**

This essay shall provide a specific answer to the article titled “What Christ Teaches Concerning Future Retribution” by William C. Procter, of Croyden, England. His essay appeared in Volume 3 of “The Fundamentals,” (edited by R.A. Torrey, 1917.) My reply shall answer from the scriptures, by the scriptures, and suffer no standard but the scriptures.

## **A Brief Outline of Procter’s Essay**

William Procter states his position as defending “the orthodox doctrine of hell.” We soon learn what he means by “orthodox” when he states “We have no right to be broader minded than He was, or to nurture false hopes... while to assume a greater zeal for God’s honor, and a deeper compassion for the souls of men, is little short of blasphemy.” He further claims that:

“...the current objections to the orthodox doctrine of hell are made by those who allow their hearts to run away with their heads, and are founded more on sickly sentimentality than on sound scholarship.”

Procter sets the foundation for his argument by laying ground rules, “confining our consideration of the subject of Future Retribution to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ.” His reasons include:

1. a desire for brevity,
2. a desire for common agreement as to the inspiration of these scriptures,
3. a certain proof that his doctrine is not unreasonable, and
4. that the words of Christ shall end all controversy, when taken in their clear and obvious meaning.

After having limited the scope of his argument thus, he begins his commentary under four additional subject headings, specifically:

1. What Did Our Lord Teach As To The Certainty Of Future Retribution?
2. What Did Our Lord Teach As To The Character Of Future Retribution?
3. What Did Our Lord Teach As To The Continuity Of Future Retribution?
4. What Did Our Lord Teach As To The Causes Of Future Retribution?

In his final three paragraphs, he concludes that “future retribution is the dark background on which ... [the Gospel] ... is presented.” He claims that “the Gospel message loses much of its force when the doctrine [of an eternal life in never-

ending torments] is left out” and “worst of all, the earnest exhortations to immediate repentance and faith lose their urgency...” and finally claims that “the doctrines of heaven and hell seem to stand or fall together.” Ironically, he then cautions us against the words of the serpent, which denied God, saying:

“Ye shall not surely die”

He leaves us with these final words:

“Let us, therefore, believe God’s truth, rather than the devil’s lie; let us accept divine revelation, rather than human speculation; and let us heed what Christ so plainly taught, without mitigating, modifying, or minimizing His solemn warnings.”

### **The Meaning of Orthodox**

Although Procter officially states that our doctrine should result from divine revelation, he seeks to identify his position as “orthodox.” Regardless, a human measure of orthodoxy is not a measure of truth, and no creed is qualified to overrule scripture. Thus, this term is meaningless within our realm of discussion.

### **The Foundation of Christ**

The first part of Procter’s essay consists of a justification for confining the arguments to the words of Christ. Although his reasoning might sound pious and full of good intentions, it goes against the very words of Christ, thus this methodology is ultimately self-contradicting.

#### **Luke 4:4**

(4) And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

In matters of doctrine, Jesus constantly quoted the Hebrew scriptures, using words such as “It is written” or the rhetorical “Is it not written?” There can be no doubt what Jesus meant by “every word of God” as He quoted the scriptures as His defense against the temptation by the devil in the wildness.

Furthermore, we would do well to avoid the error of the Sadducees unless we wish to receive a similar rebuke from our Lord and Savior in the Judgment.

#### **Matthew 22:29**

(29) Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.

Jesus issued a scathing rebuke to these scholars, because they ignored the scriptures, preferring a denial of the resurrection of the dead over obedience to

God's Word. Clearly, Jesus expected His audience to have a solid foundation of the scriptures, and every word that He spoke should be considered in that context. Anything less opens the door for false interpretation if we quote the words of our Lord out of context.

**John 10:34-35**

(34) Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?

(35) If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;

Jesus Himself says, "...the scripture cannot be broken." If our doctrines are correct, we have nothing to fear from any passage of scripture, and the clear meaning shall emerge without contradiction. Procter expresses a wish for brevity, but this is never a fair exchange for truth.

Procter also defended his limitation of scope, claiming:

"Many other passages might be quoted from the New Testament, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who was promised by our Lord to His disciples to "guide them into all truth," and "show them things to come" (John 16:12,13); but, in taking the words of Christ Himself, we shall find the greatest ground of common agreement in these days of loose views of inspiration."

**2 Timothy 3:16**

(16) All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

Procter seems to imply that his opponents would dispute the inspiration of "many other passages" that he might cite. Ironically, in my experience it is usually those that champion Procter's "orthodox doctrine of hell" that quickly flee to the claim that "not all scripture is inspired" or "profitable for doctrine." Thus, I cannot help but be suspicious of his reasons for this self-imposed limitation.

As his third reason for limiting the scriptures, Procter acknowledges that there are those who would say that his "orthodox doctrine of hell" is unreasonable, and dishonors God, and says that those who "[assume] a deeper compassion for the souls of men" fall "little short of blasphemy." This reasoning is flawed, unsound, and defies the very words of scripture, for we are told that God is love, and it is absurd to imagine that our love could possibly exceed that of God.

**1 John 4:7-8**

(7) Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

(8) He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

In contrast, Procter urges that we harden our hearts, lest we commit a sin by exceeding the love of God and Christ! Can we truly know God, if we purposely become callous to the fate of our fellow man? However, I anticipate that perhaps Procter might question the “inspiration” of the words of John, so I shall also answer him with the direct words of Christ:

**John 15:12-13**

- (12) This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.  
(13) Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Now common reasoning would lead us to believe, that if there is no greater love that a man can have but to lay down his life for his friends, then it would be impossible to surpass the love of Christ, who laid down His life for the entire world.

**Luke 9:54-55**

- (54) And when his disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?  
(55) But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

In his final reason for limiting the scope of his examination, he states:

“...the words of the Master Himself ought surely to put an end to all controversy; and these are clear and unmistakable when taken in their plain and obvious meaning, without subjecting them to any forced interpretation.”

Yet his essay has already disregarded the Word of God, who told us that “the scripture cannot be broken” and that we should “live by every word of God.” Yet besides this, Procter proceeds to break his own rule within the scope of his paper over and over again, for in practice he rejects a literal interpretation of scripture, and denies the words when taken in their plain and obvious meaning.

**Mark 7:6-9**

- (6) He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me.

### **What Christ Teaches Concerning What Christ Teaches**

Thus, I have evaluated Procter’s four stated reasons for limiting his essay to the words of Christ, and have found that his reasons themselves contradict the very

words of Christ. His conclusions confirming his “orthodox view of hell” have therefore ignored the Word of God, and are not grounded upon the Rock.

**Matthew 7:26-27**

(26) And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

(27) And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

**Matthew 7:17**

(17) Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

### **We Shall Answer Regardless**

Therefore, we should not be surprised when a flawed premise produces a flawed conclusion. We therefore reject his founding premise. However, lest any man claim that we are evading this topic, or that Proctor’s doctrine is unanswerable, let us proceed to analyze his arguments in the order in which they appear.

**Proverbs 26:5**

(5) Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

### **Retribution vs. Punishment**

Procter sets the tone for his argument in his very next sentence:

“The word “retribution” is to be preferred to “punishment” because the Bible teaches us that the fate of the wicked is not an arbitrary (much less a vindictive) infliction, but the necessary consequence of their own sins.”

Immediately, Procter has turned the ordinary and usual meanings of these words inside out. Common usage tells us that it is “retribution” that carries a connotation of vindictiveness. The word itself is formed from the roots *re* and *tribuere*, meaning “to pay back.” It is not uncommon to hear the phrase “petty retribution” and it also has an association of vindictive “payback.”

In contrast, “punishment” is a word that is associated with law and justice, and is formed from the root *peona*, as in the penal code. Regardless, “punishment” is the word used twenty-seven times within the Authorized Version, but it contains not one occurrence of the word “retribution.” Thus we shall use “punishment.”

So why does Procter say that this substituted word of “retribution” is to be preferred over “punishment” which already has a plain meaning? “Punishment” is fair and just, but “retribution” usually means to “inflict pain and suffering.” I think Procter knew that “punishment” was already weighted against his “orthodox view of hell” and thus switched to his preferred “retribution.” It is

troubling that he would attempt to mislead us as to the natural meanings and usages of these two words so early. We should weigh his future words carefully.

### **The Certainty of Future Punishment**

While a scriptural view of future punishment reveals that is indeed certain, this should be qualified by stating that this should in no way be viewed as denying mankind the possibility of the forgiveness of sins. It might seem as if there would be little to contest under this heading, but Procter has inserted a great many errors, and it is these that we must answer:

“The law of retribution can no more be repealed than that of gravitation; it is fixed and unalterable. “

This statement, taken at face value, is proved false. We have all sinned (Rom 3:23) and the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). Yet this “certain punishment” can be repealed, because the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Romans 3:23**

(23) For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

**Romans 6:23**

(23) For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I will concede that these words are not the very words of Christ, yet neither was Procter’s declaration of the “[unalterable] law of retribution.” One might argue that he could not have possibly meant what he said, but given his previous deception concerning the meanings of the word “punishment” and “retribution” this is a chance we shall not take.

**James 2:13**

(13) For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

Additionally, we should remember that our God is a merciful God. If mercy did not defeat judgment, then none should be saved. How can one who claims to be “saved” deny that our God is a God of mercy?

### **Eternal Sin vs. Eternal Damnation**

In paragraph 3 his argument of “The Certainty of Future Retribution” we read:

“Turning to the Gospel according to MARK, we find our Lord saying, in Mark 3:29: "Whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."”

The opening sentence of his essay alluded to “the 56 passages in the authorized version of our Bible which contain the word Hell.” This led me to believe that he intended to provide a scriptural answer from our Authorized Version. Yet his quotation is not from the AV, and the changed wording carries a completely different meaning.

Since Procter builds his argument upon this specific phrase, it behooves us to examine how this verse also reads from the traditional text of the King James:

**Mark 3:29**

**(29)** But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation:

Procter argues that the meaning of “eternal sin” must therefore merit an “eternal punishment” which he then defines as meaning “each repetition involving a fresh penalty, the punishment is naturally unending.” Therefore, we can see that Procter has tried to make a case that the “eternal” of “eternal sin” (which seems to be the wording of the Revised Version) means that the sin itself shall never end!

Clearly, “sin” is not the same as “damnation.” The concept of sin being perpetuated for ever is absurd, especially considering that Procter implies that God will endure blasphemies for ever and ever! We are told three times that “Heaven and earth shall pass away” (Matt 24:35, Mark 13:31, & Luke 21:33) but we are to believe that blasphemies will be continued without end?

Our authorized text warns us of “eternal damnation” without any hint or indication that any sin will be preserved or perpetuated for ever. Rather, it tells us that the damnation is eternal, and whether this means “from the eternal” or “lasting as the Eternal One” the effect is the same – the punishment, once delivered, shall not be undone.

Therefore, we reject Procter’s assertion (and implications) of “eternal sin” and will instead continue with our reading of “eternal damnation.”

### **The Plain and Obvious Meanings of Life and Death**

As the foundation of his essay, Procter agreed to two rules of his own choosing:

1. He would restrict his argument to the words of Christ, and thus
2. He would accept the words of Christ as an end to all controversy.

Specifically, I shall remind you of his *exact* words:

“In considering the subject as professing Christians, the words of the Master Himself ought surely to put an end to all controversy; and these are clear and unmistakable when taken in their plain and obvious meaning, without subjecting them to any forced interpretation.”

Yet Procter is unable to defend his “orthodox view of Hell” without breaking his own rules of professed biblical interpretation! Before he has completed his first argument concerning the “Certainty of Future Retribution” he has performed a theological about-face and denied that Christ’s words should be taken in their “plain and obvious meaning” and subjects them to “forced interpretation.”

Please pay specific attention to his theological “bait and switch”:

“A careful study of the Scriptural uses of the words "life" and "death" will clearly show that the root ideas are respectively "union" and "separation.””

Procter has just informed us that when Jesus uses the word “life” we should instead substitute the word “union”, and likewise when Jesus speaks the word “death” we should substitute the word “separation.”

This qualifies as a “forced interpretation” and Procter provides absolutely no scriptural support for his crafty substitution of new meanings for what are otherwise considered “clear and unmistakable terms” with “plain and obvious meaning.”

Universally, life and death are considered opposites. That which is alive is not dead, and that which is dead is not alive. The first verses of Genesis tell us that life is the quality possessed by every moving creature:

**Genesis 1:20**

(20) And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl *that* may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.

Furthermore, if “life” and “death” no longer have their usual meanings, how are we supposed to assume that other well known words such as “promise” and “truth” and “love” are used in their usual meanings?

Ironically, Procter implies that the proof for his private interpretations of “life” and “death” lie somewhere else in the scriptures, presumably beyond the words of Christ, since he attempts no such proof within his essay. Thus, he has also broken his first and primary rule, of limiting his argument to the words of Christ.

**Matthew 23:1-3**

- (1) Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,
- (2) Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:
- (3) All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

Thus, we shall continue to interpret “life” and “death” in their “plain and obvious meanings” and allow “the words of Christ to put an end to all controversy.”

## The Doctrine of Annihilation

At the end of his first argument of the “Certainty of Future Retribution” he closes with a statement that stands alone from his previous theme. It seems most curious, so we shall quote it here:

“As against the doctrine of annihilation, Revelation 20:14 may be quoted: “Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, even the lake of fire.””

This is a puzzling statement. If we ignore that Procter (again) has left his own confines of the words of Christ, this verse is typically quoted as a proof of the “doctrine of annihilation” because a death by fire is well known to completely annihilate its subject, consuming it with fire.

### Malachi 4:1

(1) For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

### Matthew 3:11-12

(11) I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire:  
(12) Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Stubble that is burnt in a fire is completely consumed. Plants that are devoured in that fire and left without root or branch are said to be annihilated. He that was mightier than John is said that He will “burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Like the stubble of Malachi, chaff is also well known for being annihilated in fire, let alone an entire lake of fire!

Perhaps Procter might dismiss these verses as lacking inspiration, so we shall provide him with a quotation from the words of our Lord and Christ Himself:

### John 15:6

(6) If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

If the Word “made all things” (John 1:3) surely He knows His creation well enough to choose appropriate objects by means of analogy? Weren’t we told that we should listen to the words of Christ in their clear and obvious meaning? Withered branches, when burned, are usually completely consumed by the fire!

Yet perhaps Procter might argue that we cannot interpret these words of Christ in their ordinary and usual meaning, and that perhaps it is not applicable to our subject, because Jesus did not specifically use the word *hell*, or that only our bodies will be consumed, but our souls will not be burnt (yet somehow feel pain) once our bodies are annihilated.

**Matthew 10:28**

(28) And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

The clear and obvious words of Christ warn us that the fires of judgment will destroy both body and soul in hell. One cannot deny the plain and obvious meaning of this verse without attempting to reinterpret the word “destroy.” Jesus himself gives us an example of how people can be “destroyed” by fire.

**Luke 17:29**

(29) But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed *them* all.

It seems that Procter has already passed over our passage of Matthew 10:28 in the beginning of his argument concerning the “Certainty of Future Retribution” yet he ignored the clear warning of these words. He quickly skips over this verse, only saying:

“Jesus said: “Fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” — a wholesome fear which is decidedly lacking in the present day, and which many people regard as a remnant of superstition quite unsuited to this enlightened age!”

### **Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth**

Procter immediately sets the tone of what he considers to be the “Character of Future Retribution”, saying “We have already seen that He spoke of it as full of sorrow and misery in His seven-fold repetition of the striking expression: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth...””

This certainly can not be disputed, but it should be noted that this does not indicate that the “weeping” and “wailing” or “gnashing of teeth” is the punishment in itself, but rather an immediate emotional reaction to the punishment, or the sentencing thereof.

Likewise, it should be noted that since Jesus said that both body and soul would be destroyed in hell, likewise this weeping and wailing will cease once their destruction is complete, and they are nothing more than “ashes under the soles of your feet” (see Malachi 4:3).

Furthermore, we have evidence from the Revelation of Jesus Christ that weeping and wailing will have a definite end, and that these former things will pass away.

**(Revelation 21:4)** And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

It would make little sense to interpret this verse as “neither shall there be any more pain, except for those who are not in pain” because this prophecy would then become a meaningless tautology. When death and hell are said to be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:14) we are told that after this terrible destruction that death shall be no more, and that the former things shall *pass away*.

### **Where their Worm Dieth Not**

Next, in considering the nature of future punishment, we have arrived at the familiar three-fold repetition of “their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (see Mark 9:44, also Mark 9:46 & 48).

**(Mark 9:44)** Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Procter elaborates on this passage, stating:

“Of course He was using the common Jewish metaphors for Gehenna, taken from the perpetual fires that burned in the valley of Hinnom to destroy the refuse, and the worms that fed upon the unburied corpses that were cast there; but, as we have already seen, He would never have encouraged a popular delusion.”

Strangely enough, Procter has seemed to miss the obvious implications that the perpetual fires of the valley of Hinnom existed for the sole purpose of consuming refuse! He acknowledges that worms would there feed on the unburied corpses, and notes that the worms likewise devoured the corpses. Yet he fails to notice that it was dead bodies that were consumed, not the bodies of living criminals being tortured in flames!

I cannot say what Procter means when he hints that Jesus “would never have encouraged a popular delusion” but it seems to me that by imposing his limitation of considering only the direct words of Christ, he has missed Christ’s obvious reference to the prophet Isaiah.

**(Isaiah 66:24)** And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

In yet another baffling display of abandoning his original premise of taking Christ's words in their most obvious and literal meaning, he hurtles onwards towards inevitable disaster:

“Granted that “the undying worm and unquenchable fire” are metaphorical, yet these striking figures of speech must stand for startling facts, they must be symbolical of a terrible reality. We need no more regard them materially than we do the golden streets and pearly gates of heaven; but, if the latter are emblematic of the indescribable splendors of heaven, the former must be symbolical of the unutterable sufferings of hell. “

First, obeying his own premise that we must interpret Christ's words in their usual and ordinary sense, we shall not “grant” that the “undying worm and unquenchable fire” are metaphorical in the sense of simply being striking figures of speech! When a fire is not quenched, it will completely consume its fuel before burning out (see Isaiah 34:10) and when “their worm” does not die, it completely consumes the corpse. There is no reason to search for a secret mystical meaning hiding within these plain verses.

Second, on what premise does Procter deny the actual and literal establishment of the Holy City of God upon the earth with gates of pearl and streets of gold? Is it because he thinks this is impossible for God, or is he hinting that the notion is simply absurd? Is Revelation one of the books on Procter's list that he deems of “questionable inspiration?”

Now that Procter has denied the literal interpretation of scripture and prophecy, he completes his short hop to further describe how he imagines “the unutterable sufferings of hell.”

“One can no more presume to dogmatize on the one than the other, but it requires no vivid stretch of the imagination to conceive an accusing conscience acting like the undying worm, and insatiable desires like the unquenchable fire.”

If we were to review the words that Procter would have us redefine to understand the words of Christ in “their plain and obvious meaning, without subjecting them to any forced interpretation” our list has now doubled:

1. “Life” must mean “union,”
2. “Death” must mean “separation,”
3. “Undying Worm” must mean “an accusing conscience,” and
4. “Unquenchable fire” must mean “insatiable desires.”

To this we answer that we shall not subject the words of Christ to these absurd forced interpretations. By “unquenchable fire” we shall understand that the fire shall not be quenched and by “undying worm” we shall know that their dead

bodies shall not be rescued from the worm! These are not difficult concepts, and surely no sound biblical doctrine should require such contrived theological acrobatics as denying that these passages refer to literal fire and literal worms!

### **Our Lord's Parable of Lazarus**

Procter twice calls on "Our Lord's Parable of Lazarus and the rich man" within his sections of the "character" and the "continuity" of "future retribution." Since this parable is usually used as the essential foundation of the "orthodox doctrine of hell" here we shall carefully examine his argument.

It is not uncommon for proponents of "the unending torment of immortal souls" to deny that this account was a parable at all, instead demanding that this single instance of Christ's stories to the multitudes must be an exception, a unique nugget of history or prophecy.

However, evidence of such a remarkable exception in Christ's usual way of speaking lacks scriptural support. To avoid this difficulty, Procter wisely concedes that the account of Luke 16:19-31 is indeed a parable. Yet, he does so only grudgingly and with reluctance, because in the same breath he immediately insists that the storybook elements of our parable can now be interpreted as unique divine revelation! This can be easily observed from the quotation below:

"In our Lord's parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the former is represented as being "in torments" and "in anguish" even in "Hades," and, that memory survives the present life and accompanies us beyond the grave, is clear from Abraham's words to him: "Son, remember" (Luke 16:23-25)."

Procter has made no attempt to interpret the symbolic elements of this parable, nor has he sought to read the parable for its intended meaning. Instead, he has focused upon a few isolated details within this account, and interpreted them as an unanswerable "proof" of his "orthodox doctrine."

It should be obvious why one should not form new doctrines by interpreting the story elements of a parable in the literal sense, as evidenced by the parable in Judges 9:7-15:

(Judges 9:8-9)

- (8) The trees went forth *on a time* to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us.
- (9) But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

If this parable were to be interpreted in its literal sense, as Procter applies to the parable of Lazarus, this forms a "proof" that trees are sentient, that they can talk among themselves, and even appoint themselves a king to reign over them!

When Jesus spoke in the literal sense, without means of parable, Procter explains away the ordinary meanings of life, death, fire, and worm as mere symbolic elements. Ironically, Procter admitted that “Lazarus and the rich man” was a parable, yet he has ignored all the normal rules that govern the interpretation of a parable. Thus, to support his “orthodox doctrine of hell” he must interpret the literal elements as being figurative, and figurative elements become most literal.

It seems that the sole lesson that Procter has “learned” from this parable is an expectation that the dead shall be tormented in flames of Hades, with perfect retention, restoration, and enhancement of their mental faculties.

Yet if one were to consistently apply his method of interpretation to the rest of this parable, one could as readily conclude either that the rich would be punished in a future life while the poor would be rewarded, or that rich Jews shall henceforth be tormented in Hades, while the beggarly gentiles shall be comforted by Abraham! But if this conclusion is contradicted by plainer scripture, why should the parable be given doctrinal priority?

Therefore, let us now examine Procter’s claim that the memory of the dead “...survives the present life and accompanies us beyond the grave...” against the solid testimony of the scriptures which Jesus said “cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

**Ecclesiastes 9:5-6**

- (5) For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.
- (6) Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any *thing* that is done under the sun.

The Preacher could not have spoken more clearly, when he said “the memory of them [the dead] is forgotten...” Why would Procter ignore the clear teaching of such an obvious scripture? I suspect that Ecclesiastes is one of the books that Procter would attempt to dismiss as “uninspired” and “not profitable for doctrine” (see 2 Timothy 3:16).

Job prophesied the second coming of our Lord and his own physical resurrection (Job 19:25-27.) Surely Procter cannot deny that it constitutes inspired scripture. Does Job give any indication that the dead are tormented in a conscious state between their death and the resurrection?

**Job 3:17-19**

- (17) There the wicked cease *from* troubling; and there the weary be at rest.
- (18) *There* the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor.
- (19) The small and great are there; and the servant *is* free from his master.

If we read Christ's own words, he says that the scripture cannot be broken. Regardless, if Jesus meant to teach a "new doctrine" that had been previously absent from scripture, would it make sense to disguise it as a story element in a single parable, contained in only one gospel?

To the contrary, there is a vast multitude of scriptures that liken death to a dreamless sleep, including the words of Christ. In theory, Procter should be willing to heed the words of Christ to "end all controversy." Jesus used the same terminology that was employed throughout scripture (see John 11:11-14, also Luke 8:52-55.)

**John 11:11-14**

- (11) These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.
- (12) Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.
- (13) Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.
- (14) Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

**Hades and the Rich Man**

Almost as an aside, Procter makes an interesting observation from the underlying Greek text of our parable:

"In our Lord's parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the former is represented as being "in torments" and "in anguish" even in "Hades" ..."

Procter already observed that "Gehenna" was "taken from the perpetual fires that burned in the valley of Hinnom to destroy the refuse..." and thus properly associated "Gehenna" with "hell fire." Yet, because of his refusal to interpret "Lazarus and the rich man" accordingly as a parable, he does not seem to attach any significance as to why Christ used the word "Hades" in this particular instance.

I find it a little strange that someone who claims to be a "scholar" would not recognize an obvious allusion to the well-known Greek "hell" also known as "Hades." This fantastic underworld seemed to be a popular topic of the Greek poets and philosophers, who described visits from various fictional characters which recorded all sorts of torments reported to be inflicted upon the souls of the dead.

Yet, when we recognize this Hades as an obvious story element in a fictional parable (the Greek counterpart to the fictional Abraham's bosom of the Jews) Procter has lost his only "support" for his strange doctrine of "never-ending torment" for the wealthy Jewish dead before the Day of Judgment!

I anticipate that Procter might protest that the words of the Greek poets and philosophers are not an appropriate context for Christ's parable. Yet these stories would have been well known by Christ's audience, and an appropriate setting for a parable. Yet Procter cites no less than three modern poets to lend support to his interpretation of his "orthodox doctrine of hell:"

1. "The poet Starkey stimulates our imagination in the awful lines..."
2. "...while Cecil puts the matter in a nutshell..."
3. "... and the awful description of hell by the poet Milton, in "Paradise Lost", remains sadly true..."

If Procter intends to "prove" his "orthodox doctrine of hell" from the musings of our modern poets, does He consider their inspiration to exceed that of the holy prophets and apostles? Is Cecil superior to Job, or does the wisdom of Starkey exceed that of Solomon? If so, surely the Revelation of Dante also deserves a spot in our sacred canon!

Ironically, just the few pages earlier, Procter criticized his opponents as being "founded more on sickly sentimentality than on sound scholarship." Was that a demonstration of what Procter thought constituted "sound scholarship?"

### **Lest Any Man Spoil You through Philosophy**

Having used his introduction of this parable as a launching point, Procter begins to eloquently imagine how God could for ever torment immortal souls with hell fire that is not literal, but fiercely allegorical:

"Could any material torments be worse than the moral torture of an acutely sharpened conscience, in which memory becomes remorse as it dwells upon misspent time and misused talents, upon omitted duties and committed sins, upon opportunities lost both of doing and of getting good, upon privileges neglected and warning rejected?"

Procter might as well be reading from the pages of the Greek poets, for he echoes the sentimentalities of the pagan philosophers, who describe Sisyphus continually rolling his huge stone uphill, and Tantalus forever parched and tempted by fresh fruits and delicious cool water.

I am reminded of the words of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christian apologist Justin Martyr, who warned us against pagan doctrines in his "Address to the Greeks:"

"...why do we any longer endure those unbelieving and dangerous arguments, and fail to see that we are retrograding when we listen to such an argument as

this: that the soul is immortal, ... ? For this we used to hear from Pythagoras and Plato ... before we learned the truth.”

And I also think that we should heed the words of the inspired apostle Paul:

**Colossians 2:8**

**(8)** Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

The end result of Proctor’s philosophizing is that the “vengeance of eternal fire” is reduced to an immortal afterlife of severe angst! How can he expect to be taken seriously when he argues that a future eternally burning conscience is the punishment for a lifetime of wickedness and evil? His argument is not only unsupported from scripture, but it has become absurd:

“Again, what material pain could equal the moral torment of intensified lusts and passions finding no means of gratification, insatiable desires that can have no provision for their indulgence, or if indulged, all the pleasure gone while the power remains?”

Thus Procter tells us that God will be the ultimate tempter of fallen man, inducing this creation to extreme measures of lust, depravity, and blasphemies without end? Does this make any sense? We do not worship Hades or Pluto – is this the character of the God we serve?

**(Psalms 97:10)** Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.

**(Proverbs 8:13)** The fear of the LORD *is* to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

Procter has told us that God will not destroy the source of evil, but instead He will preserve it for all eternity, and even perpetuate it so that His creation can suffer more! Procter’s “orthodox doctrine of hell” is inconsistent with the character of our God that is revealed in the Bible!

He continues, arguing that “such expressions as the undying worm and the unquenchable fire represent, not pious fictions, but plain facts; and we may be sure that the reality will exceed, not fall short of, the figures employed...” He further argues that “the doom denounced [is] more awful than that of Sodom...”

Yet how can that doom be more awful than that of Sodom, when Sodom was set forth as an example? Sodom and Gomorrha suffered a temporal punishment, and were completely annihilated, and have left no testimony of being “forever tortured after death!” They were completely destroyed by eternal fire.

Jude 1:7

(7) Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

### **Against Eternal Universalism**

Procter begins his third point, concerning the “Continuity of Future Retribution” by questioning whether there is “any solid basis... for the doctrine of eternal hope, or the shadow of a foundation for the idea that all men will eventually be saved?” Thus, it seems that he has turned his attention towards what is commonly known as universalism.

We shall make no attempt to defend universalism within this essay – both universalism and Procter’s “orthodox doctrine of hell” depend on the same Platonic assumption of the “immortality of the soul.” Yet, we shall briefly examine his arguments against scripture, and for consistency and soundness, because he may continue faulty assumptions from one portion of his essay and attempt to apply them in another. I am a little concerned by the inaccuracy of his argument:

“Much has been made of the fact that the Greek word "aionios" (used by our Lord in Matthew 18:8 and 25:41, 46, and translated "everlasting" in the Authorized, and "eternal" in the R.V.) literally means "age-long"; but an examination of the 25 places in which it is used in the New Testament reveals the fact that it is twice used of the Gospel, once of the Gospel covenant, once of the consolation brought to us by the Gospel, twice of God’s own Being, four times of the future of the wicked, and fifteen times of the present and future life of the believer.”

Because Procter has been careful to identify the Greek word by its Strong’s reference number, there can be little doubt that he indeed means *aionios*. However, I am at a loss as to how he has arrived at his specific inventory of this word, which occurs 71 times within the New Testament. Even if we limit our count to the Gospels, we are left with 30 instances, which still exceeds his “examination of the 25 places in which it is used in the New Testament.”

If Procter cannot even count the number of times this word is used within scripture in total, we surely cannot trust his statistics as to its division of use within the scriptures, and his entire criticism becomes suspect. He reveals his motive behind this new angle when he asks:

“No one thinks of limiting its duration in the first four cases and in the last, why then do so in the other one?”

His question is already fundamentally flawed, because it has omitted its usage from the other 46 instances within the New Testament. I anticipate that he shall

use this angle in an attempt to imply that “eternal punishment” should have been translated “eternal punishing” thus confusing an eternal effect with a never-ending process.

Thus, we shall list a few of the instances that perhaps he has overlooked that will demonstrate the flaw in his argument most acutely, that we may suspect that Procter did not include in his 25 instances:

**(Hebrews 6:2)** Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

Will the judgment have an end, or will Jesus never complete His judging? Are the effects of the judgment eternal, or is the process eternal?

**(Hebrews 9:12)** Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*.

Will Christ need to eternally redeem us, or has he obtained our redemption for us eternally? How many times must Christ be crucified? Does the process never end, or does the effect never end?

**(Jude 1:7)** Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Where is the fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrha? These cities were not destroyed by “intensified lusts and passions finding no means of gratification” and these cities were not transported intact into a flaming underworld. Rather, “the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven (see Genesis 19:24).”

Although some might argue that “eternal” might serve as an adjective meaning “of the Eternal”, the scriptures give us no evidence with which to maintain that “eternal punishment” means “eternal punishing.” Thus the “eternal fire” has an eternal effect, which should not be confused with an eternal process.

If we are reading the words of the Bible in their plainest and ordinary senses, there is no need to resort to a flawed argument in order to refute universalism. If life means life, and death means death, then it is not hard to understand that the second death is an eternal punishment, from which there shall be no resurrection or hope of future redemption.

## **Salt is Good**

Procter’s next argument focuses on a partial quotation of Mark 9:49, when Christ says “For every one shall be salted with fire.” In order to counter the argument of

universalism that salt has powers of purification, he claims that this instead refers to its attributes of preservation, thus implying that this verse is an irrefutable proof of the “immortality of the soul.” This conclusion is ridiculous, and can only be made while ignoring the actual words and most of the surrounding context.

**Mark 9:49-50**

(49) For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.

(50) Salt *is* good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

If we were to continue with Procter’s assertion that this verse was meant to tell us that lost souls would be tormented in hell in an especially preserved state, then why does this verse clearly state that “every one” shall be salted with fire? Is Procter claiming that none shall be saved, and every one shall go to “orthodox hell?” Jesus plainly states that “fire” shall be salted on “every one.”

Furthermore, these verses go on to say that “salt is good” – so how would “salt be good” if it did nothing but to preserve evil without end? Does his interpretation glorify God, or seem consistent with His Holy character? The worm is the well-recognized destroyer of decaying flesh and the unburied corpse, thus Procter has no excuse for attempting to twist this verse inside out until it reaches an opposite meaning consistent with his extra-biblical doctrine of “immortality of the soul.”

We conclude that this passage in Mark 9:49 has absolutely nothing to do with our topic of “eternal punishment” or even its related question of “the nature of immortality.” Perhaps this verse might be better understood in the light of the familiar phrase “trial by fire” which results in a simple understandable meaning of this passage that is not contradicted by context (see also 1 Peter 1:7.)

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that any attempt to create proof-texts for an innate “immortality of the soul” are predestined to fall short, considering the clear words given in 1 Timothy 6:14-16, which speaks plainly thus:

**1 Timothy 6:14-16**

(14) That thou keep *this* commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:

(15) Which in his times he shall shew, *who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;

(16) Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom *be* honour and power everlasting, Amen.

If our Lord Jesus Christ only hath immortality, then this also proves that mortal man, by definition, does not (see Job 4:17). Eternal life is the gift of God (John 3:16), not an innate attribute, nor an undeniable birthright, nor an entitlement.

We are clearly told that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) and none of these words are hard to understand when read with in their ordinary usual sense. The scriptures are clear when they tell us when we die we stay dead for a very long time, until the resurrection of the dead, for there is no life apart from salvation in our Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Job 4:17-21**

- (17) Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?
- (18) Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly:
- (19) How much less *in* them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation *is* in the dust, *which* are crushed before the moth?
- (20) They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever without any regarding *it*.
- (21) Doth not their excellency *which is* in them go away? they die, even without wisdom.

**Ecclesiastes 3:19-21**

- (19) For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all *is* vanity.
- (20) All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.
- (21) Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?

**1 Corinthians 15:15-19**

- (15) Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.
- (16) For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:
- (17) And if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; ye are yet in your sins.
- (18) Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.
- (19) If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

As we can see, Procter does not have the luxury of any assumption of “immortality of the soul” – yet he depends that this be accepted as a proven fact before he can even begin to prove his “orthodox doctrine of hell.” His assumption lies at cornerstone of his argument, without which his doctrine of “Eternal Conscious Torment” collapses into dust, as a house built upon the sand.

### **Capital Punishment Works Every Time**

Procter attempts to baffle us with (what he must think is) a dilemma:

“Besides, if the Divine chastisements are ineffectual here in the case of any individual, when there is so much to restrain men and women from wrong-

doing, how can they be expected to prove effectual in the next world, with all these restraints removed, and only the society of devils?”

In a sense, the existence of his question is baffling. The answer is absolutely simple: death is death, and eternal punishment is called the second death, and there will be no resurrection of the wicked from their destruction in the lake of fire. Eternal death is the ultimate restraint against wrong-doing, for it makes “doing” anything impossible.

We agree with Procter in that the scriptures do nothing to support universalism, but by the same measure, neither have they done anything to support his “orthodox doctrine” of “Eternal Conscious Torment.”

### **Greater Damnation**

Procter finally turns his attention to the “Causes of Future Retribution.” He again proposes that “eternal sin” can only be that of repeated rejection of the offers of mercy. Strangely enough, this would seem to be an argument for universalism. Could not the sinner, after being tormented for several eons, finally break down and accept an offer of mercy?

I think it is important to emphasize that these are not the words of our Authorized Version, which instead warns us that they are “in danger of eternal damnation” not “guilty of an eternal sin.” Sin is not the same as damnation, but rather sin is the act that results in damnation.

#### **Mark 3:29**

(29) But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation:

He attempts to reassure us concerning those who have never had the opportunity to believe on Christ, by quoting from the same Revised Version in Mark 16:16 of “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.” He seems to focus on the word “disbelieveth” as if this implies a deliberate act. This verse differs from the Authorized Version:

#### **Mark 16:16**

(16) He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Many other scriptures demonstrate that all men are guilty unto death, and only through the blood of Christ shall we be saved. There may indeed be lesser and greater damnation, but any degree of damnation excludes justification unto righteousness, salvation, and the gift of eternal life. There are no halfway measures into the Kingdom of Heaven, and one cannot be fractionally washed in the blood of the Lamb.

**John 3:18**

(18) He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

**Romans 5:12**

(12) Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

**Romans 6:23**

(23) For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In other words, if people who have lived and died without ever having an opportunity to believe on Christ are to be saved, it cannot be through a mere “lack of disbelief.” We may suppose that God has a reason for calling everyone to Judgment, and perhaps some might genuinely repent before God in that final day when the book of life is opened, but without this repentance and belief upon Christ, they will surely die.

Finally, Procter concludes that there are “different degrees in hell” from where Christ said it would be “more tolerable in the day of judgment” for Sodom than for Capernaum. This may sound magnanimous, but Procter is still talking about degrees of infinity! Again, because of his assumption of an immortal soul that God can not (or *will* not) destroy, he concludes that:

“It is clear that future retribution will be proportioned to the amount of guilt committed and of grace rejected.”

However, this is not the teaching of scripture. There is only one eternal punishment, which is called the second death. We are told that the dead shall be no more, and that this death is destruction, outer darkness, and ending as ashes from that unquenchable fire.

Procter’s error lies in his misunderstanding of the word “condemnation.” In his mind, it seems that he has substituted the word “retribution” or even “punishment.” Clearly, condemnation is the act of condemning, which results from judgment. One that receives greater condemnation is convicted with greater force than one who receives lesser condemnation, but condemnation is not the same as the punishment itself! There are many different ways that we may bring condemnation upon ourselves, but there is only one eternal punishment described in the Bible: the second death.

It is acknowledged that one could argue that the Judgment itself might torment the guilty conscience, and most especially of the hardened sinners or those who have purposely rebelled against God. This we shall not deny. Yet this is only the

condemnation, not the actual punishment. As Revelation tells us (and common sense demands) punishment is not inflicted until *after* the judgment is complete:

**Revelation 20:13-15**

- (13) And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.  
(14) And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.  
(15) And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

## **Our Conclusions**

Procter concludes:

“the whole drift of Christ’s teaching confirms what we learn from these isolated passages, and that future retribution is not merely an incidental but a fundamental part of the Gospel message. It is the dark background on which its loving invitations and tender expostulations are presented, and the Gospel message loses much of its force when the doctrine is left out.”

Additionally, he warns us that “the doctrines of heaven or hell stand together” arguing that “both are defined metaphorically, and both have the same word “everlasting” applied to their duration.”

Our conclusion is far different. From examining this essay we see that what Procter claims as the “orthodox doctrine of hell” is nothing more than a carefully balanced deck of cards, built upon the shifting sands of the Greek doctrine of the “immortal soul.”

Contradicting his initial premise, Procter redefined common English words including “life” and “death” and “fire” and “worm” until it seemed that he ran out of words to redefine. The scriptures, when the words are read in their ordinary and usual sense, absolutely and thoroughly contradict his entire doctrine! We can only wonder how William Procter could present such a dismal defense of his “orthodox doctrine of hell” without realizing the fragility of his own argument!

The most amazing irony lies in his final sentence:

“Is it not an echo of the devil’s insinuating doubt: “Yea, hath God said”? followed by his insistent denial, “Ye shall not surely die,” which led to the fall of man? Let us, therefore, believe God’s truth, rather than the devil’s lie; let us accept Divine revelation, rather than human speculation; and let us heed what Christ so plainly taught, without mitigating, modifying, or minimizing His solemn warnings.”

Yet Procter has argued from the beginning that man shall not “surely die.” He insists that we possess an immortal souls, that shall not surely perish, but can only be “separated from God” without end!

Procter has been repeating the lie of the serpent! Yet he presumes to warn us against those that would tell us that we “shall not surely die?” That exact lie is the foundation and essence of his assumed doctrine of immortality of the soul!

**Matthew 10:28**

(28) And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Avoiding all debate as to the nature of the body, soul, and spirit, Christ clearly states that He is able to destroy both body and soul, in hell, at the same time, in the exact same fashion, with the exact same fire.

**Our Doctrine**

Our doctrine does not rely upon the musings of sentimental poets and philosophers, nor does it seek to change the well-understood meanings of common words, neither must we search high and low for a unique bible translation that has catered to our needs. The words of the Authorized Bible, when read in their clearest sense, overwhelmingly support us. Life means life, and death means death. The words of scripture really say what they mean.

Evil will not be perpetuated for eternity, and God will not torture billions of souls without end or redemption, but He shall destroy the wicked, and they shall be no more, but He shall give eternal life unto His saints, and He is loving, just, and merciful, being truly worthy of love, adoration, and worship. This is the plain teaching of our Lord, consistent throughout all scripture.

**1 Thessalonians 4:15-18**

(15) For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

(16) For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

(17) Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

(18) Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Amen.