

far from being man's natural possession, is a divine gift, reserved by God for those who have served him. Eternal torture forms no part of the purpose of a just and merciful God.

This is the direct and simple teaching of the Bible. Popular Christianity, in concentrating on Christ the teacher, has neglected Christ the divine judge and future king. The hopes of a true Christian are centred on the second coming of Christ, to initiate an era in which 'the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord'. On such an earth the wicked, all who fail to reflect the glory of their Creator, can have no place at all.

The Christadelphians

Please be assured that anything connected with the Christadelphians is entirely free, and based wholly upon Christ's precept, "freely ye received, freely give". Christadelphians, or as the name implies, brethren in Christ, are a body of people (established initially in the mid nineteenth century) bound together by a wholehearted belief in the Bible. We do not profess to have received any new revelation, but hold that the Bible itself is able to make one "wise unto salvation" (**2 Tim. 3:15-17**). Believing in the Divine Authorship of the Bible, we do not accept any interpretation which does not harmonise with its teaching as a whole. Finding that the creeds and practices of those who claim to be Christian are in many ways opposed to this teaching, we feel compelled to stand apart from them. We believe in the personal, visible return of Christ to the earth, to establish his throne and reign thereon, and we seek to share this knowledge with others. However we guarantee that we will not pressurise you in any way, if at any time you wish to discontinue contact.

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What happens to the wicked?

Watchman Christadelphians - Leaflet 15

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What happens to the wicked?

Who are the wicked? 'All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God', wrote the apostle Paul to the Romans: **(Rom. 3:23)** not a very palatable statement to modern ears, but amply confirmed in the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

The great message of true Christianity, is that in the mercy of God, man can make a fresh start by having all his sins washed away in the water of baptism. By belief of the one true gospel followed by baptism into Christ, he henceforward walks 'in newness of life'. **(Rom. 6:4)** Christ is now his mediator through whom he prays to God. John wrote to fellow believers, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' But a man in this privileged position may fall there from - he may lose his faith and turn back into the world. Such a declension does not relieve him of the grave responsibility that he will have to stand before Christ's judgment seat. Unless he amends his ways, his final destiny will be quite different from that of those who die a natural death, after a life of ignorance concerning God's plan of salvation.

The fact has to be recognised that most men live and die in total ignorance of God and his intentions. It is impossible for them to please him, because to do so necessarily involves both the conscious recognition of God, and the deliberate ordering of one's life to please him '.... without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, (i.e. exists) and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' **(Heb. 11:16)**

The condition of this unenlightened mass of mankind is described by the Psalmist: 'Man that is in honour

and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish. Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them ... He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light.' **(Psa. 49:14-20)** Their punishment is not hell-fire, or endless torment in a subterranean abyss, but death itself, complete and final extinction. 'They are dead, they shall not live, they are deceased, they shall not rise.' **(Isa. 26:14)**

Death is not merely the end result of the mysterious biological process of ageing and decay - it is the divinely decreed destiny of sinful man. **(Gen. 3)** Paul describes it as 'the wages of sin'. **(Rom. 6:23)** It is the inevitable fate of all who have lived and died in ignorance of God. Death is not, as the poet affirms, transition to a form of life where an alleged immortal soul is freed from the body, but the end, the full stop, which terminates man's personality and consciousness. **(Eccles. 9:6)** The Bible knows nothing of pagan and Greek philosophical concepts of the soul as a separate entity surviving the incident of death. Only when it is recognised that death constitutes complete oblivion, is it possible to understand the true Christian belief of death as the penalty of wickedness, the 'wages of sin'.

This is the fate of those who, ignorant of Christ's law, have deserved neither Christ's reward nor his punishment. 'As many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law.' **(Rom. 2:12)** The destiny of those who have known Christ but rejected him is quite different. 'He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.' **(John 12:48)** This judgment, the separation of the righteous from the wicked, will take place after the resurrection from the dead and immediately consequent upon Christ's return to the

earth. This is one of the 'fundamentals' of primitive, first century Christianity, almost completely obscured by the passage of two thousand years. Paul described Christ as 'the Lord Jesus ..., who shall judge the quick (living) and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom'. **(2 Tim. 4:1)** Peter said, 'there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust'. **(Acts 24:15)** Jesus himself told the Jews that 'the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation' **(John. 5:25-29)** It was not a new teaching - the Old Testament had already promised resurrection, and the prophet Daniel explicitly linked it with coming judgment. **(Dan. 12:2)**

This, then, is the fate of those who have known Christ, but rejected him. They will be restored to life, and judgment passed on them by Christ. They will experience a limited period of punishment (the 'few stripes' or 'many stripes' of one of Christ's parables) **(Luke 12:47-48)** and then return to the eternal oblivion of death. This is referred to in the last book of the Bible as 'the second death'. From this there will be no further resurrection. It will be the final end. The destruction will be as complete as when anything is reduced to ashes by fire. Indeed, this is the figure used several times in scripture

'But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.'
(Psa. 37:20)

There can be no question of eternal torments, since the wicked are mortal: the Bible teaches that immortality,▶▶