

HELL IS FINAL

By

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“You shall not surely die”— Satan, Gen. 3:4.

“The wages of sin is death”— God, Romans 6:23.

Whenever a person begins to question some of the thinking within the fellowship with which he is identified, he soon runs into intense opposition. It happened to Luther, Campbell, and to all who have ever dared suggest that the traditional concepts need to be aired and restudied in order to bring them back into line with the truth revealed in the Bible.

The time is long overdue for those in the Christian church who claim to “speak where the Bible speaks” to carefully consider what the Bible teaches about such things as death, hell, resurrection, immortality and atonement. Those of us who have dared suggest this meet with bitter opposition and are often accused of beliefs which we do not hold. It is easier, of course, to make such accusations than it is to make an answer to the challenge of the traditions.

This article concerns the accusation being made that this preacher and others of like faith “do not believe in hell”. The accusation arises out of the fact that after carefully searching the scriptures many of us have rejected the philosophical theories of hell as Proposed by Plato and which gradually became traditional views of the churches. While we readily admit to the rejection of many traditional ideas, we affirm what the Scriptures teach about hell. Those who say we do not believe in hell know better, thus the charge amounts to a deliberate lie and an attempt to discredit one’s preaching by a falsification of what he believes.

Indeed, I believe in hell, and preach it. Anyone would be a fool who believed the Bible and yet did not believe in judgment and hell.

The question is, “What is hell?” The church generally fails to identify hell as to whether it is physical, material or spiritual. Many theories which are contradictory to each other are acceptable to the “orthodox” clergy; while the plain expression of Scripture regarding it is taboo. I reject the theories of hell which hold that the lost are to be kept alive forever in order to undergo torture by a loving God. I reject the theory that the unsaved will be given immortal bodies which are unburnable, and yet which will burn in a perpetual fire forever. I also reject the theory that hell is a spiritual state of spiritual suffering for the “eternal soul”. I reject these because they are not found in the Bible and because they are not compatible with plain scripture teaching, as I shall show.

1. The Scriptural “hell” does not NOW exist, but is for the punishment and destruction of the wicked AFTER JUDGMENT. Every reference to punishment and death of the

wicked in the Scripture is a reference to punishment and death AFTER JUDGMENT. One is not sentenced and executed BEFORE judgment is pronounced. Consider the plain words of Jesus: ‘for the hour COMES (future) in which all that are in the tombs SHALL HEAR (future) His voice, and SHALL COME FORTH (future); they have done good, UNTO (future) the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, UNTO (future) the resurrection of judgment’ (John 5:28-29). In the Revelation (20:11-15) the judgment is described as taking place ONLY AFTER the dead have been raised, and AFTER the judgment they “are cast into the lake of fire.”

Even though the King James Version, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16), uses the term “hell”, this clearly is a mistranslation of the Greek word for “*Hades*” which means the grave or place of the dead. This parable has nothing to do with the final judgment and destiny of man, as a close study will show.

“Hell” as a punishment for the rebellious sinner will exist only after the coming of Christ in judgment. All references to “fire”, connected with man’s punishment, shows that this fire is for the purpose of destroying the sinner, but no sinner will be cast into the “lake of fire” until after judgment.

2. Peter plainly states that the fire that destroys the sinner will be the fire that destroys the present heavens and earth by the melting of the elements with fervent heat (2 Peter 3:7-12). This has reference to a literal fire. The very expressions used by Peter make it definitely a fire that literally burns matter, and, as he states by inspiration, “the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” The words, “dissolved”, “burned up” and “melt” negate any theories of a “spiritual” fire. In verse 7 of 2 Peter 3 he points out that the purpose of this fire is the destruction of ungodly men. Numerous scientists point out that until recent years the words of II Peter were considered impossible, as men did not believe that the elements could be dissolved, but with the discoveries of the atom and the composition of matter Peter’s statement is understandable: “The heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word (of God) have been stored up for fire ...” (2 Peter 3:7).

3. It is generally taught that this fire of hell will go on burning forever, and that people cast into it will live in it forever. But the Scriptures do not teach this; it is a concept that naturally derives from the belief that every man is immortal and can never die. Neither idea is of the Bible.

The Bible speaks of the “eternal fire”, but this does not mean that the fire burns forever. The word “eternal” has reference to the effect of the word it modifies. So an eternal fire means a fire that brings about an eternal effect. For example, “eternal judgment” (Hebrews 6:2) does not mean that God has to sit in perpetual judgment forever, but it does mean that His judgment once rendered will stand for eternity. “Eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12) certainly doesn’t mean that Christ must forever be dying on a cross, but it does mean that His redemption has an eternal effect. “For by one offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). So with “eternal fire”. Once it destroys the heavens and earth and the ungodly, this destruction stands forever as having been done by an eternal fire. “Eternal punishment” denotes the same thing, a

punishment (not punishing) once having been enacted, stands forever. The punishment is death; the result of this punishment is eternal.

But to make this crystal clear, so that no one need misunderstand it-unless he simply refuses to break tradition-Jude writes, concerning Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them, that they “are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of ETERNAL FIRE” (Jude 7). Jude says that this is an example of judgment. Notice, then, that the fire that destroyed those cities is NOT NOW BURNING. The fire is called eternal, because it wrought a lasting effect, but when its work was done, it went out. In this sense it was “unquenchable” – man could not extinguish it. But when it completed its purpose, and burned up the fuel which fed it, it went out. Jesus Himself used this “destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah) as an example of the “hell” that destroys man in judgment: “but in the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all; after the same manner shall it be in the day that the son of man is revealed” (Luke 17:29-30). With this demonstration of history and with our Lord pointing to it as an example, what else can we do but accept the fact that the wicked are to be burned up by literal fire, just as the wicked of Sodom and Gomorrah?

4. But, then, what shall we do with the idea of the “eternal soul”, the concept that man can not die and therefore some part of him must remain on in eternity?

First, remember that the one, who invented this idea, was Satan, whom Jesus called the “father of liars”. He deceived Adam and Eve when he said “Thou shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). There is NO scripture that says man has an eternal soul. There is nothing from God nor from science to indicate that man is immortal. In fact the Bible says the opposite, that Jesus ONLY has immortality (1 Timothy 6:16). That should settle the matter, for if only Jesus has immortality, then certainly we do NOT have it. Moreover, Paul teaches that Christ came to “bring life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10). If man was already immortal, or had an immortal soul from the time of Adam, then why should Jesus come (4,000 years later) to bring it to light? But if more evidence is needed, consider what the Scripture teaches in 1Corinthians 15. Verse 18 points out that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then those who have “fallen asleep in Christ have perished”. I invite you just to think on this, and this alone for awhile, and see what it does to the tradition of man being immortal! Now consider verses 53-57. This states that when Christ comes again, THEN we mortal Christians will put on immortality! Search the Scriptures and you will find that there is no hope whatever of anyone living forever outside of Christ.

God’s original statement regarding man’s sin and its results was “the day thou eat thereof thou shall surely die”. (Gen. 2-17). After the original pair had eaten in rebellion and disobedience to the Creator, He said, “Behold the man is become as one of us . . . and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever. . . . God sent him forth from the garden of Eden . . .” (Genesis 3:22-24). Man was thus denied access to the tree of life, so that he could NOT live forever in sin, and the only ones who will ever have access to this tree again are those who enter into the Kingdom of God, as pictured in the New Jerusalem scene in Revelation 22:2, 14. God’s eternal

purpose is to have perfect unity in all of His universe, with all mankind in harmony and under His sovereignty. There will be absolutely NO PLACE in God's creation for a whole world-full – or hell-full – of rebellious sinners, who stand forever in opposition to God. Revelation states that in the final analysis there will be no place for the sinner to flee (Rev. 20:11). God's knowledge and presence reaches to all places that exist: for God to be "all in all" there must be a house-cleaning. The final and complete sovereignty of God will begin when all that reject Him are destroyed.

The wages of sin is death — not life. Life is a gift of God to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:23). "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life, but he that obeyed not the Son shall NOT SEE LIFE, but the wrath of God abides on him". John 3:36.

5. The purpose of God in creating, the meaning of Christ's death, and the ultimate consummation of God's plan are understood in the light of the fact that hell is the final destruction of the creature by fire.

(A) What God created was a TOTAL MAN. Genesis 2:7 says that BODY AND SPIRIT BECAME A LIVING SOUL, indicating that God desired a bodily creature. Matthew 10:28 speaks of the fact that He is able to destroy both "body and soul in hell", showing that judgment will mean that the Creator destroys the creature He created, because it (man) failed to turn to God in obedience to His purpose.

(B) When Christ died, it was a substitute death. He gave his life in death to take man's place of death in judgment. In Colossians Paul writes that we are "reconciled in the body of His flesh through death" In Leviticus 17:11 we are told that atonement is the giving up of life: "The life of the flesh is in the blood. I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls. It is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life." Therefore the death that Jesus died was not a "spiritual" suffering although we do not doubt that His mind was in great agony. But the thing he did to take man's place and to make atonement was TO DIE. The shedding of His blood would have had no benefit if He had not died in shedding it. He gave up life! The reason is that the penalty for sin is death, and Jesus had to undergo the very thing that the sinner will have to undergo in judgment. It was not "endless torture". There is no place where torture is said to be man's just punishment. The entire Bible holds forth the fact that death is the just punishment for sin.

The express intent of Christ was to give His "flesh for the life of the world" (John 6:51). Life is what He came to save, and Life is what man stands to lose! If the punishment is an endless life of miserable existence, then all His reference to "life" and "death" are meaningless, and His atonement is meaningless. (See Hebrews 10:5 and Hebrews 2:14, 15.)

(C) If the Justice of God is satisfied with the final and total destruction of the ungodly, certainly we should be satisfied also. Many would attribute to God sadism which is satisfied only by a horrible never-ending suffering of pain too intense to imagine. This concept of God is denied in the Bible. "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked", He

says (Ezekiel 33:11). Rather God is a just God (Isaiah 45:21). Indeed He will “destroy them that destroy the earth” (Rev. 11:18) and according to His judgment, the unrighteous are “worthy of death” (Romans 1:18, 32). But God does not inflict punishment beyond the just penalty. As to the amount of pain and misery the lost will sustain before final consummation in fire, it is not for man to determine. We do know there shall be “weeping and gnashing of teeth”. We should be satisfied to know that God, who “looks upon the heart”, is able to make the punishment fit the crime.

6. Finally, consider these pictures given of judgment and the meaning of “hell”. Matthew 3:12, the wheat is gathered into the garner, the chaff is BURNED UP; Matthew. 7:13, the broad way leads to DESTRUCTION; Matthew 13, the tares are BURNED Up WITH FIRE; Luke 19:27, the rebels are SLAIN by the King’s men (not tortured); John 15:1-6, the branches cut off the vine are good for nothing but TO BE BURNED; Acts 3:23, the sinners UTTERLY DESTROYED; 2 Thess. 1:9, DESTRUCTION BY FLAMING FIRE at the coming of Christ.

All who reject life in Christ are to be punished in hell, and that punishment is to be death, so that when the rebels are destroyed it may be said “and death shall be no more”, for “the last enemy that shall be abolished is death” (Rev. 21:4, 1 Cor. 15:26). Not only do I believe in hell, but I preach it and publish it for a warning to all who read. False accusers should take note that for “all liars ... their part shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone; which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

Remember that no one need go to hell and thus lose his life, for God has given His son “that whosoever believeth on Him should NOT PERISH, but (should) have ETERNAL LIFE” (John 3:16). I’m counting on this. Are you?

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