

ELIMINATING FINALITY

By

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A noted movie star was featured recently on TV supporting her concept of reincarnation, stating that she has lived many lifetimes and looks forward to death because it will only be the beginning of another “adventure.” This Hindu doctrine has gained much popularity in recent years, and serves to provide an escape from the Biblical doctrine of final judgment.

The concept of “finality” is especially repugnant to man. How dare God even think of bringing life to a final end! Something of man must continue. This is the belief of millions of Christians in spite of all the warnings and promises in Scripture of a final judgment and destruction of all who resist God.

The effort to eliminate finality may be beyond a remarkable piece of “editing” found in the New International Version of the Bible. The original Greek text of Jude 7 says that Sodom and Gomorrah “are set forth as an example, undergoing the penalty of fire eternal.” The King James Version, the New American Standard Version and the Revised Standard Version all render it: “are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” The obvious message is that the cities and their inhabitants were burned up by a fire that had eternal results. The burning itself was not “eternal”, else it would still be burning; neither was it a “spiritual fire” as some claim, for in that case it would be invisible and would be no example at all. The text, correctly translated, plainly teaches that “eternal fire” in the Biblical sense means fire that destroys once and forever, therefore, it is devastating to the tradition that the wicked live and suffer endless torture.

But read Jude 7 in the New International Version, which claims to be based on better scholarship and backed by evangelicals dedicated to achieving “clarity.” It read “...Sodom and Gomorrah...They serve as an example of THOSE WHO suffer the punishment of eternal fire.” (Emphasis mine, ED.) This changes the meaning completely and is obviously done to accommodate the traditional (Roman Catholic) doctrine that the unredeemed are not destroyed, but suffer perpetual torture in fire. This is a plain case of changing the Scripture to support a theory.

Regarding the finality of the fire of destruction, the Bible is consistent. John the Baptist warned that Jesus would “thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12). The farmer burns up the chaff in order to be rid of it just as the Lord will cleanse the world by burning up all that is not in harmony with His purpose.

Jesus, in his parable of the tares, said, “As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire; so shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He that has ears, let him hear” (Matt. 13:40–43). The object is not to preserve the “tares” nor to torture them, but to rid the kingdom of them.

Paul’s description of judgment also included fire, when he wrote that Jesus would be revealed from heaven “with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering

vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus; who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (II Thess. 1:7–9). The destruction is final, and stands for eternity.

Peter is even more descriptive of the final fire. “But the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men...” (II Peter 3:7). The fire is so fierce that “the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (V. 10). It is on the basis of this final dissolution of all things, including the ungodly, as mentioned in verse 7, that Peter pleads for holy living. “Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of person ought you to be in all holy living and godliness” (V. 11).

The possibility of a final end to life has never been popular with unbelievers. Pagan religions reject it altogether. The world in which Christ appeared has been subjected to pagan Greek thought for over 300 years. So thorough had been the Greek influence that at one time, according to Josephus, Jewish boys were engaging in athletic games in the nude, Grecian style, and in defiance of the Covenant Law.

The Greek philosophers were the most persuasive in all history, and the Roman world had generally adopted the teaching of Plato and his colleagues with regard to man’s being and destiny. According to Plato, there is no end. After the body is gone, life continues on another plain, and goes on for eternity. Christ contradicted the Greek Philosophy in the plainest terms, insisting that there is no life except the life that He gives and that it will be given only to the redeemed and will be made possible by a resurrection from the dead (John 5:21, 3:36, 5:28–29, 6:39–40).

He boldly refuted the Platonic concept of immortality and set forth the option of life or death as the ultimate issue. It is no wonder that the people “were astonished” because He “taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes.” Unfortunately, it didn’t take long for His teaching to be diluted with human tradition.

While belief in reincarnation may eliminate the fear of final judgment and end of life, it has nothing to substantiate it and holds forth no real hope. The Gospel is substantiated by the historical affirmation that Jesus literally died, then came back to life through resurrection, a demonstration of the Christian hope.

The gist of the Gospel is that life is temporal, but through faith in Christ it can be made eternal. The judgment is final. The unredeemed will *perish, be consumed, be put to death, be destroyed, die*. There is finality to life for those who reject God. But for the believer, this finality is eliminated by Christ who died in our place. There is a “blessed hope” of being raised up, not as another person for a brief period, but as one’s self, glorified and made immortal, for eternity.

“He that believes in the Son has eternal life; but he that obeys not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”(John 3:36).

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