

IN BIBLICAL TERMS

By

Curtis Dickinson

Many churches and denominations proudly affirm that they hold strictly to biblical authority, and adopt such slogans as “Where the Bible speaks, we speak, and where the Bible is silent we are silent.” In harmony with this slogan is this one: “Call Bible things by Bible names.”

As expressed by Professor Charles Gresham, of Kentucky Christian College: “Underlying this slogan is the general notion that when Bible names and terms are exchanged those names and terms that replace them give different meanings to the concepts to which the original terms relate. This idea is intrinsic to the revelatory action of God. Both divine act and divine interpretation of meaning become crucially significant.” (*The Christian Standard*, 8/4/96)

Beginning with the council of Nicaea, 325 men have thought to improve and clarify inspired words of scripture by forming creeds in their own words and expressions which eventually develop into doctrine contrary to the original. A good example of this is found in doctrine regarding the final destiny of the unsaved. Sinners are told that they have “immortal souls” and are asked “Where will you spend eternity?” Hell is described as a place of “eternal suffering” in which unbelievers must live forever. Others, seeking to put a less cruel spin on the punishment, suggest that the unsaved will “suffer eternal separation from God” — which would mean total extinction; since God alone can sustain life.

None of these terms are biblical. Such terms as “immortal soul” and “eternal suffering” or “eternal separation” are not to be found in Scripture. However, the Bible abounds in a variety of terms that adequately describe the ultimate fate of all unbelievers whose names are not found in the book of life.

A. Terms used in the Old Testament.

Deut. 18:15-19 – “A prophet shall the Lord God raise up...every soul that shall not hearken to that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people” (As quoted by Peter in Acts 3:22, 23). Note: it is the soul (the whole person) that is destroyed.

Psalms 1:4 – The wicked “are like the chaff which the wind drives away.” **Vs.6** “The way of the wicked shall perish.”

Psalms 37:20 – “But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of Yahweh shall be as the fat of lambs: They shall consume; in smoke shall they consume away.” The wicked “will be cut off” (Vss. 22, 28, 34, 38); “will be destroyed” (Vs. 38).

Ezekiel 18:4 – “The soul that sins, it shall die.”

Malachi 4:1 – “For, behold the day comes, it burns like a furnace; and all the proud, and all that work wickedness, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn

them up, says Jehovah of hosts, that it shall leave then neither root nor branch.” These are but a few samples of the many times in the Old Testament the unsaved are said to be destroyed, to perish, be consumed or cut off. Never is there a hint that they have immortal souls or that they are to live in a state of eternal suffering.

B. Terms used in the New Testament

Matt 3:10 – Unfruitful trees to be “cast into the fire.” The same figure is used regarding the unfruitful vines in John 15:6, and the useless weeds of Matt. 13:40. Without a doubt the unsaved are represented here, and in each case they are burned up. (cf. **Matt. 7:19**)

Matt. 5:22 – “Whosoever shall say ‘Thou Fool’ shall be in danger of the Gehenna of fire.” Gehenna was Jerusalem's garbage dump, where refuse was cast to be burned up. Jesus said that God is able to “destroy both body and being (soul) in Gehenna” (**Matt. 10:28**).

Matt. 5:29 – “And if thy right eye causes thee to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into Gehenna.” It is the “whole body” cast into the fire.

Matt. 25:46 – “And these shall go away into eternal punishment.” The punishment for sin is death, which will be eternal.

John 3:16 – Here is a contrast between “eternal life” for believers, and “perish” for the unbelievers. “Perish” is a verb used for the fate of sinners throughout the Bible.

Rom. 3:23 – “The wages of sin is death.” Many seek to avoid the finality of death in this statement by adding to it, to qualify death as “spiritual” death. This would negate the truth of the atonement, and the fact that Jesus met sin's penalty by dying a flesh and blood death, not a “spiritual” death.

II Thess. 1:7-9 – Paul writes of Jesus coming “in flaming fire,” and that the disobedient will “suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might.” The punishment is destruction – not eternally destroying, but destruction, the result of which is eternal.

Heb. 6:4-8 – The writer likens the apostate to land which bears thorns and thistles, “whose end is to be burned.” The field is burned to get rid of the thorns and thistles. Such a figure would be senseless if the sinners are to go on living in the fire.

Heb. 10:26-27 – For those who deliberately continue in sin and rejection of Christ's atonement, there remains “a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries.” For this reason, the author says “for our God is a consuming fire” (**12:29**).

II Peter 2:1-21 – Concerning the ungodly, Peter says, “But these, as creatures without reason, born mere animals to be taken and destroyed, railing in matters whereof they are ignorant, shall in their destroying surely be destroyed.” According to Peter, brute beasts and evil men come to the same final end: destruction.

II Peter 3:6-9 – The world has been “stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” (Cf. **Jude 7**).

In the highly controversial book of Revelation there is mention of torment, but when taken in context, it apparently does not refer to the final destiny of man.

In the most straight-forward passages of scripture, in words chosen by Almighty God Himself, we are told that the final punishment for sinners is destruction, destruction which brings death, destruction which results in total extinction as pictured by the burning of weeds and other combustible matter. In the plainest of words, the Creator reveals His plan that the judgment upon sinners will result in their final and total death. But what do we hear from pulpits and read in the literature of modern churches? That what all this means is that the sinners will never die, that they must live forever; that whatever the fire is, it can never burn them up; that instead of suffering eternal death, they must live eternally in order for God to perpetually torture them!

This fiendish portrayal of hell and of God – a principle of the Roman Catholic Church adopted by Protestant churches in the Reformation – has been a stumbling block to millions of people, preventing them from understanding the simplicity of the gospel and the beautiful purpose of the Creator.

I ask three questions: (1) Does the Bible say the opposite of what it means? (2) If the unredeemed (by far the great majority of humanity) are to have immortality and suffer torment for eternity, why hasn't the God of truth and justice somewhere through some of His messengers told us? (3) Why would He tell us the opposite?

There is coming a day of judgment. Yahweh God, Who is absolutely just, will punish the evil-doer, as He has promised, and will cast him into the lake of fire (the Gehenna of fire, which Jesus mentioned in Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 23:17, 33), which will be the “second death,” from which there is no return. God offers life ONLY in Christ. All who refuse that life will have no life at all.

If one is going to “speak where the Bible speaks” and “be silent where the Bible is silent” then he will not talk about “immortal souls,” “eternal separation,” “eternal suffering,” and a hell where “souls” are to live forever in misery.

The terms given in Scripture are plain and easily understood, and they are sufficient to convict the sinner of his condition and of the tragic destiny which will be his unless he repents and turns to God through His Son Jesus.

“For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?” (Matt. 16:26)

.....
Copyright © Curtis Dickinson. Formatted and Posted by Ken Fortier Ministries. Permission is hereby granted by Mrs. Regina Dickinson to reproduce and distribute Curtis' articles to as many as possible. This statement is to remain attached to this article for permission to be valid. Vol. XXXVI, Number 9.
.....