

HAS HELL FROZEN OVER?

By

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This was the caption of a newspaper report of a recent debate about the existence of Hell. It's a fact that you seldom hear sermons on this subject as once was the case when the evangelist often would "hold 'em over hell and shake 'em."

The traditional teaching, that there is a place where God sentences the unredeemed (the great majority of the human race) to be burned alive for all eternity is seldom heard today. In its place the popular teaching is one championed by the late C. S. Lewis, an idea that seems far less hideous, but just as unscriptural as the perpetual torture dogma. It defines death as "separation" and the final punishment for sin will be for the sinner to go on living, but separated from God forever. Lewis suggested that the lost sinner is also separated from all others, and continues to get farther and farther from God and the rest of humanity.

To proponents of this dogma hell has either frozen over or has been completely redefined. The teaching might be more acceptable than the medieval horrors pictured by Dante's *Inferno*, but is far off the mark both scripturally and logically. It fails to explain how life can continue when completely separated from the One who gives life or how there can be some place in God's creation where God does not exist. More importantly it refutes or ignores the many scriptures which teach that the lost are to perish and finally to be consumed by fire (2 Pet. 3:7, Rev. 20:14).

For every dogma or tradition there is some truth from which it was developed. In support of the concept of death as separation some use the cry of Jesus from the cross: "My God My, God why have you forsaken me" (Matt 17:16)? The argument holds that at this point Jesus and the Father were separated therefore the penalty or sin is to be separated from God forever. This is to ignore all the inspired teaching in both the old and new scriptures that the penalty for sin is death. This was graphically demonstrated in the slaying of sacrificial animals, about which nothing was ever said about death as separation. It was by the shedding of blood in which the life of the animal was lost. That atonement was made, and such sacrifices portrayed and typified the ultimate sacrifice made by Jesus (Lev. 17:11, Heb. 9:14, 10:10, 1 Pet. 1:19, 2:24).

The atonement Jesus made was not accomplished by His suffering, nor by His being forsaken by Yahweh, but by His death. In which there is no basis whatever for the dogma that the sinner goes on living forever, separated from God.

The Medieval distortions of the doctrine of judgment and hell are an affront to our Creator, and at the same time a stumbling block to intelligent people who can read the Bible for themselves. It is easy to see why so many today want to redefine the final death of the sinner as "separation." This eliminates the horrors of perpetual torture by fire and

at the same time upholds the world-wide belief in the immortality of the soul, a dogma taught by all major pagan religions, but not taught anywhere in the Bible. Scripture teaches the very opposite, that man is mortal. And that only the redeemed have the hope of immortality which they will receive on resurrection day (I Cor. 15:53-54)

If there were any truth in the statement, so often heard from modern pulpits, that the final death of the lost means “eternal separation,” we would expect to read about it as coming from the lips of Jesus and the apostles. Instead we read of Jesus saying that the broad way, on which the majority travel, leads to destruction, not separation (Matt. 7:13). He illustrated the final end of the unbelievers in the story of the tares and explained that they would be cast into the furnace of fire, just as the tares are burned up with fire. Indeed, they will be separated from God’s people, but their destiny is death, not to live in separation (Matt. 13:24-43).

The “golden text” of the Bible speaks directly to this point. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not PERISH, but (on the other hand) have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The word “perish” can not possibly be correctly interpreted to mean living forever in separation from God.

In my little book on *Immortality and Future Punishment* there is a list of 24 English words and the 14 Greek words used in Scripture for the destiny of the unredeemed. These words were chosen by inspired writers to describe the final state of the lost, yet not one of them implies the idea of living forever separated from God. They all mean to end life or cause it to cease to be.

Old Testament events such as the flood and the destruction of Sodom were used by Jesus with reference to the final consummation. None of them give the slightest hint that any sinners are to live in a state of separation from God.

Jude refers to Sodom as “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire,” and explicitly says that it is an example of the final judgment (Jude 7). There is not way this could be an example of sinners living forever separated from God. Neither could it exemplify the victims living in misery and torment, as is traditionally taught.

The Apostle Paul expressed the same truth when he wrote of everlasting destruction which will come upon the wicked (2 Thess. 1:9), and warns that God will destroy the wicked (I Cor. 3:17; Phil. 1:28). He says they deserve to die (Rom. 1:32) which is the wages of their sins (6:23). He states concisely. “Their end is destruction” (Phil 3:19). Nothing in all of this about their living eternally separated from God.

The belief that each person has an immortal soul, which must live on forever either in heaven or in some state of misery and suffering, is derived totally from paganism, and not from the Bible, which teaches that man is mortal.

Immortality is not inherent in human beings. There is no indestructible soul that has to be placed somewhere in its rejection of God. On the contrary, the Bible states that God alone

has immortality (I Tim.6:16) and that immortality is something that will be given by grace ONLY to those who are in Christ. All the rest are to be destroyed in Gehenna (the term used by Jesus). In Revelation it is called “the lake of fire.” Such graphic terms for a final death cannot honestly be redefined to mean living in separation from God!

As stated earlier, the dogma of everlasting torment for the billions of people who are not written in the Lamb’s book of life is an affront to our Creator. It makes Him to be a monster who keeps these people alive so that they can continually suffer the worst imaginable pain, and this with never any prospect of relief. In the words of John Stott: “I find the concept intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain.”

To use the expression “eternal separation” in the place of “hell” is nothing more than an effort to soften the harsh cruelty of the perpetual torture dogma, but it still avoids the finality of death which is clearly the intention of scriptures dealing with the subject. Remember” it was Satan who first came up with the idea of man being unable to die, when he said to Eve” “You will NOT surely die” (Gen. 3.4). Why do preachers want to join in this lie by saying that the final sentence at judgment will be to live in eternal separation from God?

Whether unending torture, as traditionally taught, or endless life separated from God, either case would mean punishment without the prospect of redemption or correction: in other words, punishment for punishment’s sake. Such a concept is foreign to all the Bible teaches about Yahweh and His justice.

Since Jesus clearly revealed that the number traveling the broad way to destruction is far greater than the relatively few who travel the narrow way to eternal life, the dogma of endless life for the former negates the glory and purity of the creation He promised. If God is to be “all in all” there can be no vast multitude still in rebellion against Him.

The lake of fire will not be frozen over on judgment day. “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom.6:23).

Paul said it all in writing that Jesus “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10).

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