

Hell – Part #2

By Joe Crews

John 3:16

In our last broadcast we delved into a subject which is shunned by the great majority of modern religionists. Multitudes have become skeptical about the reality of hell. Under the influence of higher criticism, one doctrine after another has been discarded from God's Holy Book. Even among those who still hold strong convictions about the punishment of the wicked, the interpretation of man has moulded their understanding of the subject too often. What says the Bible? This is the final arbiter of truth.

Millions have been taught that a disembodied soul leaves the body at death to be punished or rewarded immediately. This is not true. The Bible teaches that punishment will be meted out only after the judgment at the end of the world. Further, Jesus taught in Matthew 5:30 that the body would be cast into hell and not some disembodied soul. Language could speak no plainer. "... for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." Friends, that settles it forever doesn't it? We discovered in yesterday's broadcast that hell will be this earth turned into a lake of fire. Listen to the vivid description of it given in Isaiah 34:8,9: "For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch."

Add to that the text in Revelation 20:9, "... and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them." There you see this earth turned into a burning lake of fire and brimstone in which the wicked are going to be consumed. The wicked will be burned right in this earth itself.

Now how long will they burn? Friends, I don't know exactly, but I do know that they shall not go on burning endlessly. Finally the fire will go out. The wicked will be burned up. This earth will be recreated and turned into heaven or the new earth. The wicked never receive immortality or eternal life. They have no contact with Christ through whom eternal life is given. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." 1 John 5:12. "... the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:23. And so those wicked ones who never received the gift of life through Jesus Christ will have to die. They cannot keep on living with immortality.

At this point a question may arise in your mind about some perplexing Bible statements. For example, there is a text which says that the fires of hell are

unquenchable. What does that mean? Let's allow the Bible to do its own explaining of this text in Jeremiah 17:27. The Scriptures tell us that the gates of Jerusalem would burn with a fire that "shall not be quenched." Now there's an unquenchable fire, friends. Does that mean the fire will never go out? No, the fact is that the city was burnt to ashes by the fire and had to be built back again, according to 2 Chronicles 36:19-23. The word "unquenchable" means simply beyond the power of anyone to quench or put out. The strange fire of God which destroys sinners cannot be extinguished and no one can deliver himself from the power of it.

Some may say, "But doesn't the Bible teach that it's eternal punishment?" Yes, we readily concede to that, but again we must compare text with text to understand the true meaning. Some words of the Bible are used in a different way now than they were used in olden times. Are you sure that the word eternal means without end in every case? Let's take a look at a text, dear friends and see how the Bible uses it and not the way we might use it in our modern vernacular.

In Jude, verse 7: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." Here we are told that the fire which burned Sodom and Gomorrha was eternal fire—but is it still burning today? On the contrary, the Dead Sea rolls over the site of those ancient cities.

Second Peter 2:6 tells just how complete the destruction was: "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly." Notice that this eternal fire brought the cities to ashes and it is an ensample of what will happen to the ungodly. The same kind of eternal fire will someday consume the wicked and bring them to ashes on the face of the earth. The results of the burning will be definitely without end because there will be no resurrection from the second death.

Another text which has caused some concern is Matthew 25:46, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." Please note that this verse reads "punishment" instead of "punishing". And what is the punishment for sin and sinners? The answer is in 2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9: "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

You see, friends, the punishment is here called everlasting destruction. Thus we can see that the wicked do go away into everlasting punishment because it is an

everlasting destruction from which there will be no resurrection. Thus we see how clear and plain the Bible truth is made by allowing it to explain itself.

Now we'll read a few texts to see how complete the work of destruction will be. Jesus made it clear in the words of Matthew 10:28, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Oh friends, both the soul and body will be destroyed in that fire on the authority of Jesus' own word and teaching. Sin and sinners will be wiped out of existence so completely that the universe will be just as clean as it was before the entrance of sin. Here's the way Malachi describes it: "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts." Malachi 4:1. Even Satan, the root of evil, will be brought to ashes along with all his followers. They shall be consumed into smoke. Notice Psalm 37:10, 20: "For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. 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."

My friends, the theology of man has painted our kind heavenly Father as a cruel God who delights in torment. But that picture is not true. How repugnant to imagine that He's like some ogre who would perpetuate the existence of deathless souls for billions of years just so they could suffer the exquisite torment of unending fire. It was that very thought, by the way, which turned young Robert Ingersal into the world's greatest infidel.

Now I realize there is another extreme also. Some believe that God is too good to punish the wicked at all. But in between these extremes is the Bible picture of a God of justice who recompenses every man according to his works. Read it in Revelation 20:12, "... and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." This thought is repeated again in Revelation 22:12, "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." I don't deny that there will be degrees of duration and intensity, because each must suffer according to his life record, but the end must be death. The wages of sin is death.

Now we shall consider another Bible phrase which has caused some perplexity about the punishment of the wicked. The book of Revelation uses the term, "for ever and ever" in describing the smoke of those who will be burning in the fires of hell. Again we must let the Bible be its own expositor. How is the term

"forever" used in the Scriptures? If you will read Exodus 21:1-6, you will find exactly how it is used. There you find the rules laid down for the keeping of a Hebrew servant. "If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door posts; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever." Now how is the term forever used here? Well friends, it simply means as long as a person lives. The Hebrew servant was to serve his master forever, which meant only as long as he lived.

In 1 Samuel 1:22, Hannah took her son to serve in the Lord's house forever. But in 1 Samuel 1:28 we are assured that it was to be for as long as he lived. In Jonah 2:6 the word forever means only the period when Jonah was in the whale's belly. It is true that the wicked will burn forever in this same sense. They will burn as long as there is any part of them to burn and when they are burned up, the fire will go out.

Friends listen, some day soon the universe will be clean once more. There will be no devil to tempt and no sinners to defile. Rebellion will not rise up the second time. Nahum 1:9 tells us, "What do ye imagine against the Lord? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time." God has made gracious provision for all to be saved. He doesn't want anyone to be lost. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

Hell was never intended for you or for me. It will be prepared for Satan and his angels. If we get there it will not be God's fault but rather it will be in spite of His wonderful design to save us. Whoever goes there must do so in spite of the love of God and the cross of Calvary. Only one thing can cause us to go to hell and that is sin. And the greatest sin of all is to refuse the way of escape that has been provided. Listen to me, no one is going to be lost just because he fell into the trap of sin. No one will go to hell because he stole, killed, or committed adultery. He will go to hell because he refused to turn to Christ for deliverance from those sins. The greatest sin is to spurn salvation and the most unanswerable question in all the world is this, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?" Hebrews 2:3. There's no answer to that question because there is no escape. Let us not neglect the secret of deliverance. Accept Jesus now that you might receive eternal life through Him.