



The Fires of HELL

The Prevailing Opinion in the Christian World is that anyone Unsaved Should Anticipate Spending all Eternity, Fully Conscious, Tormented in an Ever-Burning HELL ! Is That Perception TRUE?

© Golden Sheaves, Box 1411, Clifton, CO 81520-1411, 7-31-12 [171] golden.sheaves@hotmail.com

Compassionate Christians of all ages have to some degree been self-traumatized by the belief that their loved ones, who have not or did not believe in and “accept Christ”, face a future of excruciating and unending torment for all eternity in a place called “Hell “! More than a few biblical passages, when casually read, seem to support this belief.

Thoughtful believers often detect an inconsistency in this, in that they regard such assignment as contrary to the nature of a merciful and loving God. It is also obviously incongruous that a person who is merely disinterested in ‘salvation’ is punished as extremely as any arch criminal like Hitler or Stalin. More than that, babies also, who for no greater fault than never having had an opportunity to pursue salvation, in some denominations, face the same awful fate. This belief system, perhaps, causes more consternation among believers than any other teaching.

It’s the rare individual who has ‘searched the scriptures’ and has considered carefully what the Bible actually says in this regard. Most just take for granted what their priests or ministers tell them. For many hundreds of years humanity has labored under concepts that have incorporated ideas drawn from extra-biblical sources – paganism even! No wonder the apparent incongruity.

The Sense of the Matter

Not only does this incongruity stand out, but also there are other presumptions regarding the prevailing teaching about Hell that make no sense. For example, in what body does the condemned person exist while in Hell in order to feel the agony of fires?

Isn’t pain physical? Don’t we need a physical body in order to possess sensual capabilities? We don’t consciously feel pain when asleep or when under sedation. What senses come alive after our decease, and how do they do so? It certainly isn’t our physical body that feels anything after death, so does either the soul or the spirit activate those senses after people die? Few believers have pursued this line of consideration.

Typically it’s alleged that ones’ immortal soul is what is consigned to Hell. So is it the soul that possesses the attributes of consciousness and sensation? If that were the case, then how would it lose such sensual capabilities when the body is asleep or under sedation?

Religion correctly represents that ‘a person’ consists of body, soul and spirit. This is based on scripture such as what is found in 1st Thessalonians 5:23, which makes reference to these three essential components of human existence. At least, as it regards our physical life, we can’t ‘live and move and have our being’ without being in possession of all three of these. Body, soul and spirit: each providing the vital elements of our conscious and functional existence. If we lose any one of the three, we can not exist as a living human being. For example, without the spirit in man providing cognitive consciousness, we exist only in what is called a ‘vegetative state’.

What IS a Soul?

Before we can consider the widely held teachings on the matter of ones’ eternal destiny, whether to a positive assignment or to eternal torment, we must

understand what component of our former existence is what is preserved for all eternity after death. After all, if nothing of our former state is preserved, how then can we be conscious of the torments of such assignment? So, if the prevailing teaching is true, we must identify what it is that's preserved in order to perpetuate consciousness and sensation.

The fundamental premise in this belief system is that in some manner we remain alive even after we die. How can that be?

Body, soul and spirit: What are these? Now, in the secular or scientific world, we would recognize that a viable person exists in physical form, alive and with a consciousness. Any living thing would have the same, except that among animals, instinct would replace those cognitive skills unique to humanity. Religion often alleges that the distinction between humans and animals is that animals don't possess souls. But, is this idea biblical, is it scientifically accurate? Can we even legitimately involve science in addressing this theological question?

Adam Became a Living Soul

In the second chapter of Genesis, we are told that upon God breathing into his lifeless physical body, Adam became a living soul. Theologically, that seems to uphold the common teaching, unless and until we discover that the human kind isn't alone in being a soul. Being a soul, is a key consideration, not just our possessing one! Because you see, what Adam **became** was what other physical life forms had become before he was made! The word 'soul' is the Hebrew word '*nephesh*',¹ a word commonly applied to animals. However, our English translations don't convey that well, as the same Hebrew word is commonly translated 'living creature' (not soul) when referring to animal life. Nephesh is applied to animals, and refers to the animal kind in such places as Genesis 1:20, 21, 24, 30 and 2:19; 9:4 & 15-16. Genesis 9:5 is interesting, in that nephesh is there translated, "the life of man". The 'soul' is by definition the life which we possess, it doesn't represent our conscious cognitive ability or our character. The word 'soul' is what imparts life. It is what we lose in death. It does not convey the mental skills that we are also provided in

¹ Strong's #5315; a living air-breathing creature of the animal kind. (By no means unique to human beings as it's used.)

addition to being made alive. That comes from a different component, the 'spirit in man', which gives us the unique cognitive mentality that is unique to the human kind.

The Spirit in Man

Paul understood this. He made specific reference to the matter in 1st Corinthians 2:11-16. "*For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the **spirit of man** which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*" Not only does he refer to the source of human consciousness, but explains that that human spirit can receive the Spirit of God into our spirit, and thus take on His Mind above and beyond what our own natural cognitive skills allow us!

So, the teaching that animals don't have souls is technically incorrect. They are souls, just as man is. Adam became one just as had the air-breathing life forms created just before he was. As far as just being alive, man and animals are the same in that respect, and scripture tells us that. "*I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: **as the one dieth, so dieth the other**; yea, they have all one breath; so that **a man hath no preeminence above a beast**:² for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? (Eccl. 3:19-21) "For the living know that they shall die: but **the***

² At least, in the sense of being alive. Humans and animals are similar in that respect: they exist under the same living characteristics and limitations. But, character development thru our conscious spirit is another matter entirely. We find it is that spirit that God preserves for restoration into our resurrected bodies. (Acts 7:59 & Luke 23:46)

dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. (King Solomon speaking in Ecclesiastes 9:5-6) (KJV)

David also affirms that our thoughts (consciousness) **cease** upon death. “*Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.*” Paul expresses the same understanding, likening death to sleep. (1st Cor.15:51; 1st Thes. 4:14 & 5:10, etc. (& Dan. 12:2)) In making a comparison to sleep, we see that they understood death to be an unconscious state.

With this, we face a theological dilemma!

Consciousness by Our Spirit

No, it's in the spirit dimension that we differ from animals. They operate with the limited instinct-programming that God placed within them, and we with a free moral agency that allows us to operate on a vastly higher plane of conscious awareness.

Our consciousness is derived from our spirit component, not the animal life form that animates us that is our soul. The dead, as Solomon tells us, lose all conscious awareness. That's profound! It's especially profound when we consider how it factors into the Heaven and Hell teaching. With the person entering a sleep-like state at death, how does our conscious awareness and the supposed ability to sense pain become activated?

Restating our earlier question, If a person is consigned to Hell in a conscious and sensing state, which of our life components would provide such capability? We need to answer this question before we can ever affirm the prevailing teaching that the unconverted spend eternity in torment. One must be conscious to experience torment.

A further question: Would the Spirit of God that Paul refers to in the passage quoted above allow us to correctly understand this subject?

Two Kinds of Hell!

Another problem area that accounts for the typical belief in an ever-burning Hell is the result of translational factors. The Greek texts (and for that matter the Hebrew also) uses different words for 'the

grave' and for 'hell-fire'. Unfortunately, the English translators used one word to translate either one, without making distinction. The Greek 'hades' refers to the grave, not a place of eternal torment, while it uses 'gehenna' in reference to fire. Religious leaders rarely explain which is which, when describing what they teach regarding the punishment of those whom they deem unconverted.

Now, hades refers to the grave, the place where either converted **or** unconverted are interred at death. Why didn't the translators make a distinction that both converted and unconverted are placed in hades? Why don't we see hades translated 'heaven' as often as it's translated 'hell'? The grave is omnifunctional. It receives the good as well as the bad.

One instance where this is transparent is the passage in Psalm 16, “*For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*”

³ God's Holy One (this isn't David, it's Christ) ⁴ wouldn't be consigned to the ever-burning Hell. Anyone consigned there, as common teachings allege, would never be there only temporarily. Clearly, this Hell is referring to **the grave**, not gehenna fire – the grave from which a person anticipates being resurrected. If we make the distinction between what was written in the original Greek – between the grave and a hell-fire – a lot of clarity emerges.

Gehenna Fire

The Greek word *gehenna* is used only twelve times in the New Testament. (Matt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15 & 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5 and Jas. 3:6) (Additionally, ten places in the New Testament where the English word Hell is used, it is *hades*, which means the grave.) In addition, in the book of Revelation, we find references to a feature called 'the lake of fire'. Is the lake of fire that same place as the one people conceive of as the ever-burning Hell? *Gehenna*? Let's consider what we're told about this extraordinary 'place'.

The Lake of Fire

In the book of Revelation, chapter 19, verse 20, we read: “*And the beast was taken, and with him the false*

³ Psalm 16 uses the Hebrew *sheol*, the equivalent of the Greek *hades*, indicating the grave, not Dante's Inferno.

⁴ Peter and Paul made that clear in Acts 2:27 and Acts 13:37.

*prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a **lake of fire** burning with brimstone.*" From the context, we realize that this occurs just after the defeat of the Beast Power's armies, at the onset of the millennial age. It involves, at this point, just these two individuals, living human beings.

In the next chapter, verse 10 we read, *"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."* Again, from the context, we see that this is a spirit being, Satan, who joins the Beast and False Prophet, but clearly AFTER the millennial age. He, as a spirit being, incapable of death, will remain in perpetual torment in this place. It doesn't say the same of physical human beings.

The SECOND Death

Later on in chapter 20, we are introduced to a new concept: a second death. *"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And **whosoever** was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."* (vs. 14-15) Now, we face another revelation. It tells us that people (whoever) will experience death more than one time! Then we must ask, why? IF a person's first decease results in their being consigned to their eternal destiny, then why is there a lake of fire and why is a second death at all necessary? Could it possibly be that the first death does not place a person in either hell-fire or heaven, that there has to be a time of judgment prior to such assignment? And, would such an idea be consistent with a first death being comparable to an unconscious sleep, with a day assigned when all will be resurrected and restored to consciousness on the day of judgment? Is there to be a resurrection of the dead, and if not for this reason, what for?

(Verse 13, the verse just before, explains that death and the grave will release up all who are in it for the purposes of sentencing, according to their works.)

But in addition, this passage explains that there will be a time when the symbiotic-institutions of 'death and hell' (death and the grave) will become extinct (no longer necessary) by being consumed in this same lake of fire. What is this revealing?

Summing up, in chapter 21, verse 8, we read, *"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."* This presents us with the categories of people who will be consigned to extinction at this time. This consignment will be after the millennial age, not at the moment of ones' death. (Rev. 20:5)

Clearly, these passages in the later chapters of Revelation do not picture people being consigned to everlasting torment in flames of fire. We see the Beast and the False Prophet first experiencing this lake of fire assignment, prior to the millennium, followed by Satan a short time after it. Then, a general resurrection in which all of humanity is raised, judged and sentenced before experiencing death a second (final) time. How could anyone experience a second death if they don't ever live again? Being resurrected, in other words?

The resurrections of the dead is a very fundamental biblical teaching. In fact, it is an essential doctrine of true Christian theology. Those belief systems that dismiss such an event are under-informed.

Earlier in chapter 20 we read, *"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. **But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.**"* (v. 4-5) This tells us that there's to be a resurrection, involving only the Saints, prior to the millennium (the 1000 years) but the rest will wait 'til after the millennium for their time to be restored to living consciousness in a later (second) event.

Two Biblical Fundamentals

As has been presented, we see that the Bible clearly represents the event of death as first a state not unlike sleep. We have seen that the soul is that component of our existence that is the air-breathing animal-like characteristic that all living creatures possess. It is our spirit that imparts consciousness. Secondly, we see that it is necessary for the individual to be resurrected back to a living state to stand before God in order to receive Judgment.

Think about it, if each person were to be assigned to an ever-burning Hell at the time of their deaths, then those who died thousands of years ago would have experienced thousands of years more of torment than someone who has died recently. Is this just? Not only is such an idea inherent in the common Heaven & Hell teachings that the unconverted, but otherwise ‘good people’, suffer the same torments as do the depraved wicked, but the early deceased suffer ages longer than their later-arriving counterparts. Is this biblical? Is this apparent injustice the determination of an ‘all-knowing’ and ‘loving God’?

So we see biblical fundamentals presenting the first death as an **unconscious state**, where the individual is unaware of the passage of time – a state in which they remain, awaiting a **resurrection** in order to receive their just assignment, either to Life or to the second Death. Any belief system that dismisses these fundamental teachings is in clear disregard of God’s Word and mis-represents God’s benevolence.

Judgment of All Nations

Further illustrating this are Christ’s own words in Matthew 25:31-46. *“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ... v.41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: ... v.46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”*

From this we can see that the sentencing event will raise up the converted **and** unconverted together. This does not occur individually as each person experiences death, but is a congregate gathering at the end of time in which the two groups need to be separated for sentencing. Religious people could see this clearly, if they were to study the Word faithfully without the preconceived ideas that taint so much of the religious world’s basis of understanding.

Apostate Assumptions

Ideas were incorporated from the pagan world as the early church embraced apostasy toward the third and

fourth centuries. It is well known that as masses of people were garnered into ‘the church’ after Emperor Constantine ‘legalized’ Christianity, many pre-existing pagan beliefs were simply ‘christianized’, mostly by re-naming prevalent beliefs and practices. The Heaven & Hell teaching is no exception.

A case could also be made for the ‘going to Heaven’ idea. IF the Saints don’t receive their spirit bodies until the time of the second coming ⁵ (Philippians 3:21), then in what form do they ascend to ‘be with the Lord’? Paul, in 2nd Cor. 5:2-4, refers to this interval, between our decease and the receipt of our glorified bodies as being ‘unclothed’!

Eternal Judgment

The concluding chapter of the Old Testament leaves us with a picture of God’s intent toward the wicked. Rather than eternal torment, He describes an eternal punishment in the form of extinction from existence. *“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.”* Nothing remaining! This is by far more merciful than what religious people have been told, more merciful for both recipient and survivors. The post-judgment age will comprise a society of a pure refined state of righteousness. 

To better understand this subject, request the following studies: See the heading on page 1 for a mailing address.

Related Topics: (available from this author)

“The Resurrections from the Dead”
“The Rejected Resurrection”
“Understanding the THREE Resurrections”
“Lazarus and the Rich Man”
“Heaven & Hell, or a REAL Future?”
“Defining the Second Death”
“The Incurably Wicked”
“The Rest of the Dead”
“The Resurrections and God’s Judgment”
“The 14th Chapter of Revelation”

⁵ *“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall **change our vile body**, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”* (Php. 3:21) (KJV)