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A Living Hell



"Something to Think About" Series by Don ward

Death is not a mystery. Life is a mystery. Death is the absence of life.

Yet heathen religions from time immemorial have fabricated endless mysteries about death. You wonder how they would know about the weird, wild or wonderful experiences dead people purportedly have.

The biblical hope is life after death (not during death), hence, the resurrection of Christ Jesus from death to immortality. His resurrection became the blueprint of our hope (1Pet.1:3). He lived, he died, he was raised to life again (Rev.1:10). It goes like this.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep . . . For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 1 Cor. 15:20-23

Death is often alluded to in the bible as "sleep" especially for those not under the penalty of death. Jesus said his friend, Lazarus, was asleep (Jn.11) when He knew he was dead. In that context He told Mary, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die". Like Lazarus, he will sleep for awhile. Likewise, resurrection is sometimes alluded to as waking up (Jn.11:11 Isa. 26:19, Ps. 17:5, Dan. 12:12, 1Thes. 5:10).

Death itself is the same for the just and the unjust. The difference is that the unjust have no hope for a future life, only to be raised, judged and sentenced to die again, the "second death".

“ . . . there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” Acts 24:15

“ . . . He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.” Rev. 2:11

Unfortunately, many in the Christian faith have adopted the teachings of Plato that say in effect the dead are not dead. And since the person remains alive he/she must live somewhere. It's claimed the good go to heaven, but the bad to hell- a living hell. This forms the basis for the doctrine of eternal torment of the unjust.

This says that justice requires horrible, inescapable and eternal suffering for a few years of sin. This isn't justice. It doesn't even come close. For ultimately,

“ . . . the wages of sin is death,” Romans 6:23 (If death does not mean death, can you give a word that does?) The bible often uses such plain language as death and destruction regarding the end of the wicked. However, some believe terms such as the following teach eternal suffering in a living hell.

Jesus used such terms as “*hell fire, everlasting fire and unquenchable fire*” “*Hell fire*” (Gk.- geenna fire) is a reference to the city dump where fire, rot and decay consume everything that is unsalvageable. It is definitely not a place of preservation but the very opposite, destruction, total and final. “*Unquenchable*” carries the message that this fire cannot be extinguished even as firemen cannot save a building that burns to the ground. There are no reprieves, no last-minute dousing of the consuming flames.

“*Eternal fire*” and “*everlasting fire*” warn us of the lasting results.

Consider the historic judgment pronounced on the nation of Edom.

Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever. Isaiah 34:9-10

The “*lake of fire*” in Revelation is a figure. Of what is it a figure? Of the second death. It is a figure defined by the bible itself.

The lake of fire is the second death. Rev. 20:14

Some say the lake of fire explains what death is. Death becomes the figure and the lake of fire is its literal meaning. But as you can see above, they have it backwards. It makes a big difference.

The lake of fire graphically pictures total and final destruction (which the second death will be for those who experience it). You can further see the figurative sense in which it is used when the bible says that even death itself and hell (Gk. *Hades*; grave, place of the dead) are cast into it and destroyed.

“*And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire*” Rev. 20:14. (No more hell!).

“ . . . I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine, a theological and moral enormity, a bad doctrine of the tradition which needs to be changed”. -Clark Pinnock, B.A., Ph.D., McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

The good news is, the unsaved will not consciously suffer forever. The bad news is, still, they will die. The great news is that Jesus has overcome death and given us-

“ . . . a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, . . . ” 1Peter 1:3

If you wish to study this further please contact me or go to

<http://www.mindspring.com/~anthonybuzzard/articles.htm> or [http:// www.comingkingdom.org/ATCmag.html](http://www.comingkingdom.org/ATCmag.html)