

November “Life in America”

The REAL Warming to Fear
Phil Sanders

“And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched’” (Mark 9:43-48, ESV).

“Hell” is probably at the top of the list of taboo subjects. It is the one place no one wants to go. If the Scriptures are to be believed, however, hell will not be empty. In fact, Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matt. 7:13-14).

A 2005 FOX News poll showed more than nine in 10 Americans (91 percent) believe in God and almost as many believe in heaven (87 percent). Only three-quarters of Americans (74 percent), however, say they believe in hell (www.foxnews.com).

Researcher George Barna found in 2003, “Most Americans do not expect to experience hell first-hand: just one-half of 1% expect to go to hell upon their death. Nearly two-thirds of Americans (64%) believe they will go to Heaven. One in 20 adults (5%) claim they will come back as another life form, while the same proportion (5%) contend they will simply cease to exist” (www.Barna.org). According to Barna, “One in every four adults (24%) admitted that they have ‘no idea’ what will happen after they die.”

The Scriptures always speak of hell as a real place that wicked spirits enter after the judgment day. Revelation 20:10-15 refers to hell as the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast, the false prophet, and the devil are cast. “And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

The great white throne scene in Revelation 20 reveals that Jesus will assign to each person an eternal destiny according to his works. Each will be judged by the things written in the books. The book of life records the names of those who will share an inheritance with Jesus. “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15).

What Will Hell Be Like?

Here are the descriptions of hell in the New Testament:

“*Outer darkness.*” Jesus describes the punishment of the wicked as being cast into “outer darkness” (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Pet. 2:17; Jude 13). This darkness is “outer” in the sense

that those in it are conscious of not being with God and with His saints inside the gates where there is joy and blessing (Rev. 21:8).

“Away from the presence of God.” They will be punished with an eternal destruction in the form of a separation from God’s favor (II Thess. 1:9). God will not hear their prayers nor help them when they cry to Him. They can never enter God’s eternal kingdom (I Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19-21), where He will show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards those who are in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:5-7). Instead those in darkness have been “accursed” (Matt. 25:41).

“Weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Jesus describes those who are cast out as having intense mental anguish of utter sorrow and regret (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). Part of the torment of hell is living with the consequences of bad choices, remembering disbelief and sin. Abraham reminded the rich man in Hades of his “comfortable life” and not listening to Moses (Luke 16:19-31). Eternity is so designed for the wicked that they cannot forget their rejection of God.

A place *“prepared for the devil and his angels.”* Hell was not originally designed for man but for the devil and his angels. John said, “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 burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8; cf. 22:15).

“Eternal punishment.” Jesus said, “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:46). Jesus said that eternal punishment would be in the place of “eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). Punishment here is not annihilation but pits of darkness filled with conscious, suffering beings.

“Indignation, wrath, tribulation and anguish.” Paul said God would render to each according to his deeds (Rom. 2:6-11). The selfishly ambitious and disobedient to the truth will find God’s indignation and wrath. Distress and anguish will come upon every soul of man who does evil.

“An Unquenchable, Eternal fire.” Jesus called hell a “furnace of fire” (Matt. 13:42, 50); it is an “eternal fire” (Matt. 25:41) and an unquenchable fire (Mark 9:43-48). The Hebrew writer warned those who go on sinning willfully face “a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire that will consume the adversaries” (Heb. 10:26-27).

“Where their worm does not die.” Jesus says hell is the place where “their worm does not die” (Mark 9:43-48). Mark is quoting Isaiah 66:24, referring to the corpses of those who have transgressed against God. The worm here is a maggot that feeds on dead flesh. The consuming fire and eating worm never accomplish, however, the annihilation of those who are in hell. Otherwise the worm would die.

“Tormented day and night forever and ever.” John says in Revelation 14:9-11,

“If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full

strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name” (NASB).

The contrast of Revelation 14:11 and 14:13 centers on whether one is at “rest” or not. While those who die in the Lord rest from their labors, the beast-worshippers have no rest day and night.

Let’s Think!

The greatest threats to our lasting future do not come from global warming or nuclear war; rather, they arise from spiritual ignorance or complacency. If we believe the God of the Bible, we must also consider our eternal destiny. The day will come when all from the least to the greatest will stand before the great white throne to be judged according to what they have done good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-15). On that day little else will matter but that we are right with the living God, washed in the blood of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16), and having our names written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Some think of hell as a figurative place and not real. The Bible, however, uses figures of speech not to dismiss a concept but to emphasize it. If hell is real, then it must be taken seriously. Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). If Jesus took it so seriously, then so should we.