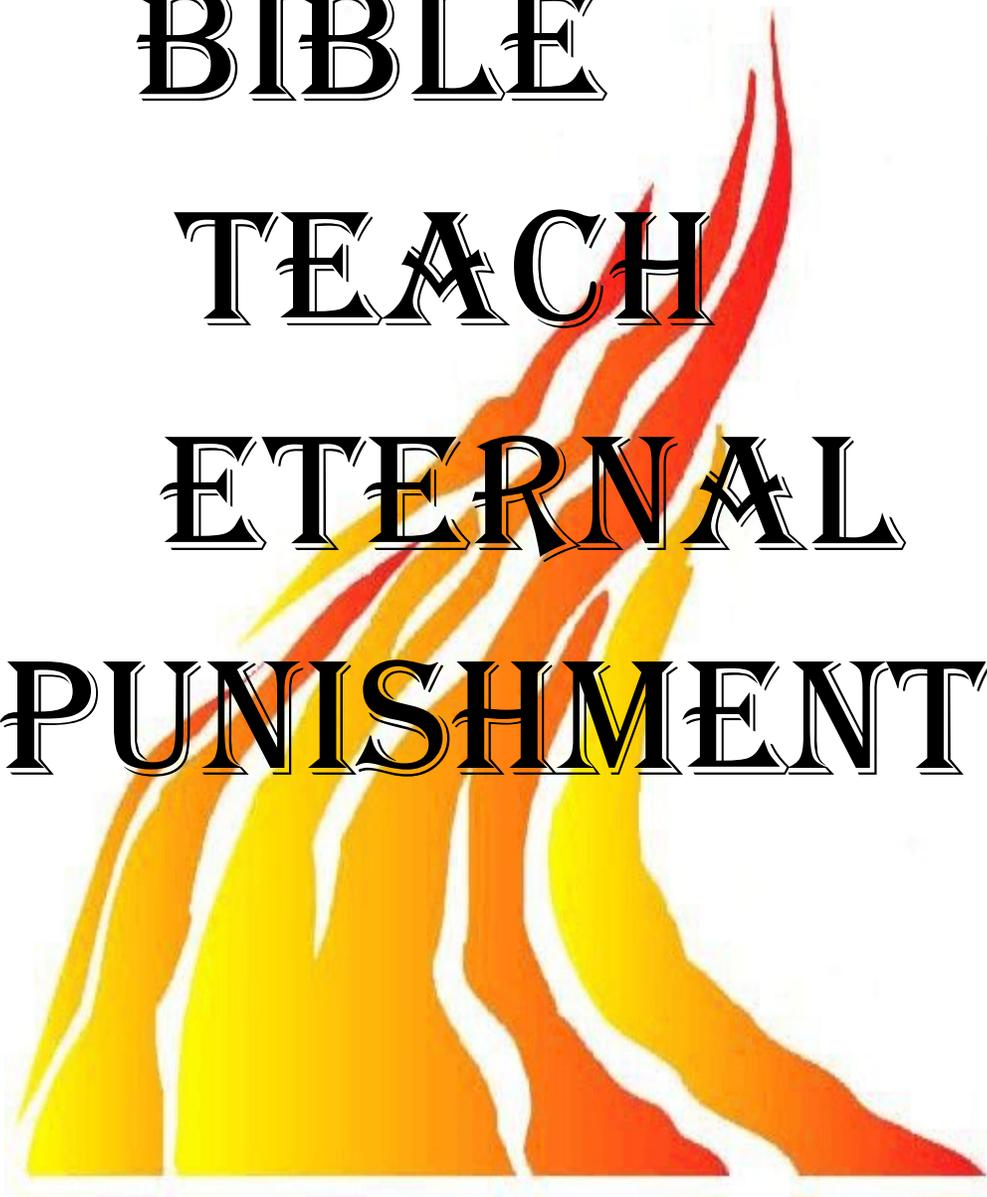


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Larry Dishman

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Does the Bible Teach Eternal Punishment? Part One

Matthew 25:41 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:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Revelation 20:11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

There are those (even some that call themselves Church of God) who have recently come to believe that hell does not last forever; or they say that eternal punishment is a myth. Let us examine this subject in the light of God's Word. Although we are going to be dealing with this in a doctrinal way, by the help of God, we will deal with this in an evangelistic way as well.

Some people are always running off into their reasoning, but speculation on this subject is entirely in vain. On such a subject as the one that is before us, an ounce of God's revelation is worth more than a thousand tongues of man's speculation. When it comes to a subject like this, we need to let God be true and every man a liar. Any teaching that denies a literal fire and eternal punishment is just speculation that cannot be considered a serious interpretation of the hell that Jesus spoke about in the Word of God. Those who deny the Scriptural inherence, naturally, have no problem in supporting the idea that eternal punishment does not exist. However, if one accepts the authority of the Scriptures as being inherent and accurate, then it is clear that Christ taught the doctrine of everlasting punishment.

As you consider this, let the Lord give you understanding. We must subject our concepts of hell to God's revelation and to what the Bible has to say about the subject. All truth runs parallel and never contradicts. To build a doctrine upon certain portions of Scripture, taken out of context and contradicted by other clear texts, is unsound. It is not only unsound, it is also unsafe. One can take Scriptures out of their context and prove anything. That is why we have so many religions in the world today. People have taken Scriptures out of context and built all kinds of doctrines around these Scriptures.

For an example, I will share with you a story about my daughter Angie. My family had been traveling with me when I was a full-time evangelist, staying away from home for as long as four months at a time. During three of those months, I was preaching nearly every night.

When Angie turned eighteen, she was tired of traveling; she wanted to stay home and get a job. At the time we lived out in the country, back a lane, and we really did not want her staying in that country home all by herself. So we held her off as long as we could. Finally she came to me one day and said, "Now, Dad, if I could take the Bible and prove to you, by the Scriptures, that you ought to let me stay at home, would you let me stay home?" I said, "All right, Angie, give me the Scripture." She had a pretty good one. She turned over to 1 Thessalonians 3:1 and said, "Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone." Since we were living in Athens, Tennessee, she thought that verse fit. But that Scripture was not talking about Athens, Tennessee.

I use that illustration to show that you can use the Bible to prove anything. Friend, you need to *rightly divide* the Word of God, and by the help of God, that is what we want to do in this series. All truth runs parallel, and a false doctrine seldom goes singly. One false doctrine compels its holder to match up other doctrines to go with it. If you watch people who go wrong doctrinally on one point, it is not long until they are off on something else doctrinally as well. That is the danger of departing from the sound Scriptures of God's Word.

Throughout the Bible Jesus said more about hell than He did about Heaven and than He did about love. Thinking seriously and biblically about hell is something that most people do not want to do. If we, as God's people, could really see what God has saved us from, it would cause us to shout and praise God in a greater way. At the same time, unbelievers need to be warned that eternal judgment awaits them unless they repent of their sins and turn to Jesus Christ for salvation.

I realize that it is not popular to talk or preach about hell, or to discuss everlasting punishment. One survey showed that 76 percent of people polled believed that Heaven was real; however, only 6 percent of those same people believed that hell was real. The subject of hell is rarely believable or popular. But my goal in this series is to be biblical, not popular. I am not in a popularity contest. I want to tell people the truth from God's eternal Word.

Many people cope with the *idea* of hell by denying the *reality* of hell. Some people find it offensive when others bring up this topic. Additionally, I must admit that I do not like preaching about hell. If I had my choosing, I would rather talk about the love of God or the mercy of God. I preach about hell primarily out of obedience and faithfulness to God's Word—like a doctor who has to tell the patient bad news. Confidence in the truth of God's Word and His love for people forces me to speak of things that people do not want to talk about and things that people do not want to hear.

Hell is certainly out of fashion in this age of tolerance. It represents the ultimate intolerance. By its very definition, *hell* means someone is wrong and will have to suffer the consequences of his or her error. For the majority, the old idea about hell has faded out, and pastors of cultured churches refuse to revive this subject. Yet, the Bible says in Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."

Many people assert that hell is just a scare tactic to manipulate people and cause the weak-minded to believe in God. Some say: "In this modern age, we don't believe in scaring people. Preachers tell deathbed stories and talk about God burning people in hell. Fear is not a good motive." However, I read in Hebrews 11:7, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with [what did he move with?] *fear*, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." (It is a shame that someone did not tell Noah what the psychologists believe about hell today.)

You might say that fear is not a good motive, yet to teach your little child the danger of fire, you will bring that child over to a wood stove or a fireplace and you will tell that little child: "It's hot. Don't touch this. It will burn you." You will do your very best to scare that little child into staying away from that hot stove. Also, you might take that child out close to the road where cars are speeding by and try to explain the danger to that little child: "Stay out of the street. Stay out of the road. Don't get near this street. Do you see those cars? Those cars will run over you, and you will be gone."

You are trying to scare that child because you love him. You are trying to scare him because you do not want to lose him. You want to scare him because he is important to you. Likewise, God wants people to fear Him enough to be saved. Romans 3:18 tells us, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." We need more preaching on the fear of God. That is one of the problems we have today. People do not have the fear of God as they used to. Every spiritual revival that has ever come about has been built on preaching the judgment and the wrath of a furious, righteous, holy, and just God.

To those who say, "Well, I just don't believe in it," I ask, "Was Jonathan Edwards wrong when he stood up by the power of the Holy Spirit and preached that message: *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God?*" I do not think he was wrong. He was moved by the Holy Ghost. People were trembling under old-time, Holy Ghost conviction.

Fear and conviction were so strong in that place that people crawled to the altar. They could not walk. They were grabbing for the pillars and falling to the floor and making their way to an altar of prayer, pleading with God, fearing that they might fall into the pit of hell before they could reach the altar.

By preaching on this subject, I am not discounting God's love. I believe in preaching about the love of God. As Billy Sunday used to say, "You can't love the flowers unless you hate the weeds." You can't love God unless you hate sin, for it was sin that nailed the Savior to the Cross. The more you love and appreciate the Lord Jesus Christ, the more you hate the thing that caused Him to suffer on the Cross of Calvary. It was your sins that nailed Him to the tree. He endured that great pain and agony because He loved you. He tasted death for every man.

The plain fact is we talk about hell because the Bible asserts that it is a reality. If hell is exactly as the Bible describes it, then no more frightening a reality exists. Imagine a physician who tells a patient about the risks of smoking. This doctor begins to warn the patient that if he keeps on smoking, he could develop lung cancer or emphysema. The doctor says: "You are going to have shortness of breath. It will be difficult to breathe, and there will be times when you are going to start coughing and choking." Then the doctor begins to talk about the ordeal of treatment, and the patient responds: "Come off of it, Doctor. You are just trying to scare me." That patient fails to realize that the doctor's goal is not fear; the doctor's goal is life. The physician is not trying to create cringing terror, but to motivate practical life and also enhance change.

It is hard to talk about hell. My goal is not to scare anybody but to present as clearly as I know how the dangers that lie

ahead for those who refuse the way of repentance, faith, and holiness. I want people to be drawn to Heaven by love, but they cannot see the value of Jesus' love without understanding the terrifying doom from which God is willing to rescue them. The burden of my heart is that by God's grace, if the warning signs are read early enough, people may choose another road besides the road that leads to destruction. The Bible speaks plainly of this road: ". . . broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Many people say that it is hard to believe in hell when one considers the principle of love. They say, "How can a loving God send somebody to hell?" Their logic is that love never hurts anyone, and God is love; therefore, God would never hurt anyone, especially by sending them to hell. The problem with this logic is that it is based on a false definition of love. Jesus came and died that we might escape this terrible place called hell. He tasted death for every individual, according to Hebrews 2:9. A love that "would never hurt anyone" is sentimental love, not the kind of love that is portrayed in the Bible. Sentimental love is based on feelings. Furthermore, sentimental love is actually destructive. People who will not let others get hurt or suffer as a consequence of their actions are actually harming them by removing responsibility from them. A sentimental view of God's love leads them to believe that He would not allow humans to experience the consequences of their choices. Such a view has no basis in the Scriptures. God's great love for us is what is known as "tough love."

Love welcomes all who will respect it, but love does not tolerate disrespect and irresponsibility. I once read that love will always excuse a blind person who steps on its toes, but it will back away from the person who continually tries to stomp on its toes. Love may not keep a record of wrongs, but it does discern the essence of those wrongs. If they arise from a willful disregard and selfishness, love quickly steps back. Even what we call "unconditional love" has one essential condition: each person in the relationship must accept an appropriate level of responsibility. Hell, then, is the natural consequence of rejecting freedom and love; it is a fulfillment of justice. If justice rewards those who respect the order of things, then justice also demands a penalty for those who will not respect it. Some demand their freedom, and then when things turn out wrong, they complain to God. Dear one, you are treading on very thin ice if you demand that God set you free to do as you please and then insist that He protect you from the consequences of your choices. Many are tempted to try to create God in their image, after their liking, but we do not have the privilege of editing the Bible. It is not a looseleaf document that can be expanded or deleted according to human preference, or to a whim. It is the Word of God, and it teaches that a loving God gave us the freedom to reject Him, if we choose; however, it is a freedom that has eternal consequences.

Can eternal punishment be harmonized with the love and the grace of God? Yes, it can. One is faced with the fact that the only place which proves absolutely that God is a god of love and a god of grace is the Scriptures. If one accepts the doctrine of God's love and the doctrine of grace as revealed in the Bible, how can that person question when the same Bible teaches eternal punishment? Hell is the expression of God's settled, eternal, unchanging wrath against sin. God does not throw temper tantrums. His anger against sin is built into His nature. God's displeasure can reach a boiling point when sin reaches an intolerable level. As with Sodom and Gomorrah, what happens when God has had His fill of sin? God's fierce wrath against sin is as much a reflection of His character as His love.

The wrath of God is not a popular subject. I do not necessarily enjoy teaching or preaching about it, but if I did not warn people about eternal judgment, I would be like a fireman who failed to warn people about a fire. Some ask: "How can you reckon eternal punishment with the love of God? How does this all fit in?" I respond to those questions in this way: "The truth that God is love comes entirely from the Bible. If the Bible were not true, then we would have no proof that God is love. If you reject what the Bible says about eternal punishment and about hell, if you are logical, you also have to reject what the Bible has to say about love. Then your whole foundation begins to crumble."

Hell explains the necessity of Christ's birth, His death, and His resurrection. If hell is not real, why did Jesus Christ come to this earth and walk among us? Did He just come here to get away from Heaven? Friend, I do not think that the manger looked that good to Him. Jesus came precisely because we were condemned to hell unless He did something about it. Thank God, He was willing to do something about it, and He *did* do something about it.

If God's wrath were no big deal, why was Jesus so concerned about it to the degree that He was willing to leave the Glory world and come down here and suffer and die a horrible death to redeem us? He did it because He realized the awfulness of hell. If hell is not real, then why the Cross? This is the ultimate question. Why would Jesus die if we did not need to be rescued from a dreadful destiny? Jesus was willing to be crucified so that you and I could escape this terrible place that the Bible calls *hell*.

Because Jesus Christ believed hell was so serious, He gave His life so that you and I would not have to go there. According to John 3:18, those who do not believe are "condemned already." Those who reject Jesus Christ must accept the consequences. Sadly, we have lost the urgency of the Gospel in our day because we have lost the reality of hell. Without hell

the Gospel makes no sense. Without hell there is no grace.

It is hard for many people to accept the fact that good moral people also go to hell. We may be able to understand and even accept the judgment of hell for a person who deliberately defies God or for someone who is a practicing atheist or a mass murderer. Some people's conduct is so despicable, it is not hard to believe that they deserve the terror of hell for the torment that they have brought to others. However, some people struggle with the assertion that ordinary, everyday people are going to the same hell. This viewpoint fails to recognize the severity of wrongdoing as measured in part by the stature of the One against whom the wrong has been committed—our loving Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes when young people turn eighteen years old, they say: "I am free now to do what I want to do. I have been under all of these rules and regulations, and I have been looking forward to this time of freedom. Now I can live it up and sow these wild seeds. I have really been looking forward to this time." Young person, take your freedom seriously. God takes it seriously. You see, freedom has a dark side. For instance, you have the freedom to speed while driving in the automobile. If that is what you want to do and if the road is straight enough, you could drive a hundred miles an hour or more. But there is the possibility of a traffic ticket. There is another possibility of causing an accident. So, the freedom to choose means the possibility of making the wrong choice. Freedom carries within it the seeds of consequences that will sprout either into a harvest of joy or a plague of weed-like problems.

God created humanity with the freedom to choose, but inherent to that freedom is the possibility of judgment and death. Among other things we were created with the freedom to reject God. But there are consequences of that rejection. Most people want freedom without consequences, but there are consequences to freedom. During an altar call, people have the freedom to say no to God and walk out the door. God will not force people to get saved. Yet, with that freedom to reject God comes some consequences.

Our choices have consequences, not only in this life but in the life to come as well. Failing to proclaim the bad news of hell leaves people with a false sense of security and a distorted value for living. Some day there is going to be a tragic surprise for too many people who did not understand the fact that there are consequences for making the wrong choice. There are consequences for the person who rejects God, who rejects God's revelation, who rejects God's salvation, who rejects God as Creator, who rejects God as Redeemer, and who rejects Him as Christ and Lord. Such a person experiences these consequences in every aspect of his or her being and will continue to experience these consequences throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.

Today, modern preachers have explained away the torments of the damned. Nevertheless, in view of hell's reality, we dare not neglect it. To ignore it is to perish there. To fail to see the truth of it is to occupy it and make it your everlasting home. Preachers who follow the Lord Jesus Christ must preach about an eternal hell or they will be the cause of the ruin of those whose life cries will be heard in hell, a place of which they were not warned. A man who believes the Bible and seeks to please God must preach a literal and eternal hell, just as the Bible teaches.

There are some doctrines that are false, but they are not damnable. For instance, I was raised in a church that taught it was wrong to use musical instruments in the worship service. We did not have a piano or a guitar. Now I do not think that belief will send people to hell. I believe in having music in the church and I enjoy it, but that is not a "damnable doctrine." However, to teach people that there is no hell is a damnable doctrine. To teach people that hell does not last forever is a damnable doctrine. Why? For this reason: if the sinner is convinced by the pastor that hell does not last forever or that it does not exist at all, he could well reason in his mind: "I am enjoying my sin, and since the pastor said, 'There is no hell,' or 'Hell only lasts for a period of time,' I am going to take my chances. I am going to enjoy the pleasures of sin, and maybe hell won't be too long and then I'll cease to exist."

That is a fearful, damnable teaching! People can reason this out in their minds and, in the end, be lost eternally because the pastor or the preacher did not rightly divide the Word of Truth. I tell people wherever I go, "If you do not believe in hell, do not come around where I am preaching, because you are probably going to hear about it."

One may not believe in hell, but their refusing to believe in it in no way diminishes the reality of an eternal hell. Neither the Jehovah's Witnesses nor any other cult is ever going to be able to argue an eternal hell out of existence. Hell is going to be just as hot for those people who did not believe as if they believed in it all of their life. Not believing in hell will not cool it off one degree for that individual. I have often explained it like this: If all the water were converted into ink, and all the steel were converted into pens, half of the horrors of hell could never be portrayed. If all of the fires that ever were and all of the fires that ever will be were contracted into one fire, it would be like a painted picture on the wall compared to what hell is going to be like.

Sinner friend, when you have been in hell for one hour, you will have suffered more than ten thousand tongues could ever tell. The very thought of hell staggers the imagination—a place so vile, so despicable, so torturous, so deplorable, so

notorious, so nefarious. It is a place of great torment. The very mention of the word *hell* sounds ugly and vile. It produces a very dreadful sound. The very word *hell* is dreadful. Hell is a place beyond your darkest imagination. Hell is a reality that will not go away just because people say, "I am not going to think about it." Hell entails eternal punishment, utter loss, rejection by God, terrible suffering and unspeakable sorrow and pain. Hell's agony is ongoing and never ending.

There are no words to adequately portray the horrors of hell. Nothing on earth can compare with the horrors of hell. No living person has any real idea how terrible it is going to be for those who wake up in this place of darkness. No madman in his wildest flights of insanity ever beheld the horror of hell. No man in delirium ever pictured a place so utterly terrible as this place called hell. No nightmare racing across a fevered mind ever produced terror to match that of the mildest hell. No murder scene with splashed blood and oozing wounds ever suggested a revelation that could touch the borderline of hell. Let the most gifted writer exhaust his skill in describing this roaring cavern of unending flame, and he would not even brush in fancy the nearest edge of what hell is going to be like.

Many people think that God is too good and compassionate to send a soul to hell. They ask, "Would an earthly father send his son to destruction?" No, but that father could not prevent his son from committing suicide. A man's life fixes his eternal place. It is all within the power of the individual. God places Heaven and hell before us. It is within the power of each individual to make the right choice. You are responsible to choose for yourself. If it were up to God, He would choose Heaven for every individual. "The Lord . . . is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

On the Day of Judgment only two groups of people will step forth. Think about that! Of the millions and billions of people upon this earth, on the Judgment morning there are only going to be two groups of people: "they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:29). There are only two destinies for mankind: Heaven or hell. The Judgment will only know two classes of people: the saved and the lost. There are only two eternal destinations: the blessed abode of the saved and a place of total darkness called *hell*. God will classify each individual by their acceptance or their rejection of His great saving plan for mankind while they were here upon this earth.

Now there is a lot of confusion, prompting questions, such as: "What is the difference between hell and the lake of fire? Where does one go immediately after death? What is the lake of fire?" Our text says, "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14a). The best way I know to explain it is like this: today, one who violates the law is taken into custody. He is placed in jail until his judgment is set. This is exactly the way God deals with the sinners. Hell is merely the jail; later, the lake of fire will be the eternal penitentiary. Someone may ask, "Why?" People who die as the rich man who awoke in hell are still waiting, for the final score has not been added up yet. The results of all their evil deeds have not yet come in. The final tabulation of all their wicked influence is still accumulating.

If you are a sinner, you have added twenty-four more hours of sin to your record than you had at this time yesterday. This record is being added to every day; more sins are being added to your record. Sinners do not suffer the full consequences of their actions in this life. They do not see the full impact of their sin in God's eyes. They do not fully see how much they have violated themselves. They do not fully see how much they have hurt people. They do not fully see how future generations will be affected by their actions. But every once in a while, they catch a glimpse, a dreadful glimpse, of this reality.

Hell fulfills the demands of justice. As with Heaven, the existence of hell fits not only with the clear teachings of the Bible but with our instincts and intuitions, which tell us that wrong must be punished, that evil must not have the last word. We know in our hearts that for justice to be served, evil has to be punished. Dear sinner friend, an eternity in hell will not begin to exhaust God's anger. Yet, it is all deserved; sin against an infinite God demands an infinite and everlasting punishment.

Sometime back I was in Mobile, Alabama. I had the address of a house where I was supposed to go and measure for carpet. As I pulled up to this house, I saw three men dressed up, talking to the lady. I figured that they were Jehovah's Witnesses. They were trying to leave her some literature, which she refused. So I met these men on the sidewalk, and I believe that God was in it. They said to me, "Would you like some literature?" I looked at the back of it, and it said, "Watchtower." I said, "I am not interested."

Then I took up a conversation with them, and I said: "How do you believe about hell? You think that the grave is hell, don't you?" They said, "Yes, that is what we believe." So I quoted Luke, Chapter 16, verses 19 through 31. I asked them: "In hell the rich man 'lift up his eyes, being in torments.' You think that is the grave, right?" Again, they said, "Yes, that is what we believe." I said, "The words of Christ emphatically teach the consciousness of the state of a soul after death." I talked to them about Luke 16:27-30, which reads: "Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent."

I told those young men, "Hell has to be more than the grave." The rich man said, "Go warn my five brethren, lest they

come into this place of torment." I said to them, "If his brothers would have been born again, been saved, their conversion would have not kept them out of the grave." Hebrews 9:27 tells us, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." I also said to those three men, "Repentance and conversion will keep one out of hell, but it will never keep you out of the grave." They had no answer for that.

Often I quote the Scripture in Proverbs, which says, "Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell" (Proverbs 23:14). Parent, whether you correct your children or not, they are still going to go to the grave, because "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." But by bringing them up according to God's Word, there is a possibility that we can deliver their soul from hell. Psalm 9:17 says, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." Hell is something besides the grave, because everyone is headed for the grave, whether they are wicked or not.

The account of the rich man and Lazarus is either a parable or it is real history. I told the three Jehovah's Witnesses that it is *not* a parable. The Bible does not say it is a parable; it is real history. If such a state of things does not exist after death of the body, then Christ falsified this story. I believe that the Bible teaches a definite, literal hell fire that lasts forever.

Acts 7:59 says, "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." When Stephen was about to die, he did not ask that the grave receive him; but he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The Bible says in Philippians 1:23, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." Paul expected to be with Christ when he breathed his last breath.

Now, let us think about a body adapted for hell. Some people say: "This body would be burned up in just a few moments. How can you preach everlasting destruction?" I admit, I do not know how a body could long endure the pain and the fires of hell. In this world we know that a few moments of fire usually destroys a human body so that life is an impossibility. But with God all things are possible. What He has said, He will bring to pass. It would take no more of a miracle for an individual to stay alive in the fires of hell than for a body to be reassembled from the dust of the earth or be gathered from the waters of the sea; yet, that is something that God has promised to do. God's Word says that these bodies are coming up out of the graves and up out of the sea. A God that can do that can create a body that will be able to endure the flames of hell throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.

Fire usually destroys life in a human body, but there were three Hebrew boys—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who went in a fiery furnace that had been turned up seven times hotter than before. They came out of that furnace without the smell of smoke on their clothes! A God who can do that can create a fire where the body will be tortured and tormented, but never consumed. Again, it is as easy to believe that there will be physical bodies in hell and in the lake of fire as to believe that God kept those Hebrew boys in that fiery furnace.

We can understand it by reading 1 Corinthians 15:52-53, where the Bible says: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." The Lord would not raise up the bodies of the dead, invest them with immortal and indestructible conditions and then immediately blot these individuals out of existence, as some teach. The Lord would not resurrect and endue the bodies of sinners with immortality if He was going to consume them out of existence.

It is utter nonsense to think of an immortal spirit, a resurrected, spiritualized, and imperishable body being reduced to ashes and existing no more. On the Judgment Day the unsaved will not rise to the resurrection of damnation. Hell is a place where there are souls, and these souls have some kind of a body. In the Resurrection the lost will not be given a glorious body like the saints of God, but one suited for eternal torment. It will be a body made for hell, one that feels and experiences constantly the sting of death and never dies. The wicked will not rise with the body of the just or with a body adapted for Heaven.

One hour in hell will spoil all sin. Hell, hellfire, and damnation in hell is such an inconceivable punishment, were it thoroughly believed, it would nip all sin in the bud. Then on Judgment Day, God will assign them to the penitentiary, the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the place where the sinner is sentenced to. Eternally the lost will be there, never to stop the anguish, the burning, the screaming. There is no second chance, because the Judgment will be final. It will be set. There will be no exit, no end, no water, no relief. Over and over and over again we are reminded that those who reject the Gospel of Christ must suffer the second death. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Ye *must* be born again." Those who have the second birth will not have to suffer the second death.

Dear friend, if you are without God, please consider this message. The things that I have talked to you about are real. You have the freedom to reject this message, but there are consequences to making your own choice. The consequence means eternal separation from God.

Does the Bible Teach Eternal Punishment? Part Two

Matthew 25:41 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:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

There are three reasons why the Christian should know about hell. The first reason why the Christian should hear about hell is to give him a greater appreciation for his own salvation. Knowing just how severe hell really is will cause us to appreciate our own salvation much more than we do. We have been saved from the wrath to come. The more we study about the place called *hell* and the place called the *lake of fire* and the more we understand how terrible it is, the greater our thankfulness that God saw fit to save us. God not only saved us from sin in this life, but He saved us from the wrath to come. Understanding about hell inspires us with a new adoration for the One who loved us and gave Himself for us on the tree.

One time in a revival service there was a man who started shouting and running the aisles while the preacher was preaching about hell. After the service was over, the evangelist said to that individual: "Why were you shouting? Hell is a serious subject." The man said, "I was shouting because I don't have to go!" That is enough to make an individual want to shout. Thank God, nobody has to go to hell! The way has been prepared for every individual to escape the damnation of hell.

The second reason Christians ought to know about hell is to give them an increased fear of the Lord. The Bible says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). The main reason for keeping God's commandments should be the love that we have for God. But due to a lack of fear of the Lord, many professing Christians are living compromising lifestyles. This lack of fear will bring a slackness in the Christian's walk, making him more susceptible to a lifestyle of sin. If every professing Christian had a greater fear of hell, it would help them to fight against the lukewarm and slumbering spirit of our age. God hates lukewarmness to the degree that He said He would not tolerate it. He let us know if we persist in lukewarmness, He will spew us out of His mouth (Revelation 3:16).

The Bible says in Deuteronomy 10:12, "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him . . ." In this verse you can see that the fear of the Lord comes first, then you are able to walk in His ways and love Him. Dear one, if you do not hear about hell and you never hear about the judgment to come, your fear of the Lord can easily slip away. No doubt that is what has happened in many churches, because the preacher never preaches about the judgment to come or about hell. Hebrews 12:28-29 tells us: "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire."

The third reason Christians should learn about hell and study the Scriptures concerning hell is because it will inspire them to witness in a greater way. The words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 state: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. *Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.*" If you will look in the Book of Acts and study the life of the Apostle Paul, you will find that he persuaded a lot of men. One of the motivating things behind this was that Paul understood the terror of the Lord. He understood the judgment that was yet to come.

You might say, "I have talked to a lot of people, and they would not respond." Paul also talked to many people who would not respond. Two men who come to mind are Agrippa and Felix. Agrippa said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28); and Felix said, "When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25).

When we understand the Scriptural doctrine concerning hell and eternal punishment, we will have a greater desire to convince men of the wrath to come and to let them know how they can escape this wrath. The terror of the Lord, not the terror of men, motivated Paul to preach with a proper heart. I believe this caused him to have a greater burden. Not only did Paul preach the Word of God, but he said in Acts 20:31, ". . . I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." The knowledge that Paul had of eternal, everlasting destruction for the sinner caused him to move with a heavy heart towards those

he was trying to win to the Lord. So the Apostle Paul and his brethren used every argument and persuasion to cause men to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The doctrine of hell should motivate us to speak out in a greater way, letting the sinner know that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life.

This leads us to the question, Does the Bible teach soul sleep? There are several verses that those who support soul sleep quote, but they quote those verses mistakenly. Let us look at some of them. First Corinthians 15:18 says, "Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." The expression "fallen asleep" refers to the bodies of the believers. *Sleep* is never used to describe the soul in the New Testament. The Bible teaches that the soul of the believer departs to be with Christ. At the time of death, the *body* is spoken of as "sleeping in the grave." So, the term "soul sleep," or the sleep of the soul, is not found in the Scriptures. Nowhere does it state that the soul sleeps or passes into a state of unconsciousness.

Another Scripture that is often used is found in John 11:11-14, which reads: "These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead." It is obvious that when Jesus used the word *sleep*, He was speaking of death. The soul does not sleep. If anything, the soul becomes more active after death. It is the body that sleeps. When the dead body is put down in the grave, it will cease to toss; it will not be disturbed anymore. To the wicked the grave is a prison; but to the godly the grave is but a bed, and all its bands are as soft as downy feathers. It is an easy, quiet sleep.

The Bible says in Matthew 17:3, "And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him." Moses and Elijah talked; they were not asleep. In the Bible the word *sleep* is a common metaphor for death. Ecclesiastes 9:5 puts it like this: "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten." Cults, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and others, use this verse to teach that once an individual dies, they do not know anything. That is true, as far as their bodily senses and worldly affairs are concerned. That body, lying in the grave, is no longer worried about the electric bill and the car payment and the house payment. But mark it down, the soul lives on. For the soul, there is no rest, no sleep in hell.

Sinner friend, you will never go to sleep in the lake of fire. In hell there is no rest from the torments. The Bible says in Isaiah 57:20, "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest." However, Psalm 127:2 says that God "giveth his beloved sleep." In hell you are not God's beloved; therefore, you will not receive the blessings of sleep ever again.

In hell you are a nobody. There is no fame and fortune; no status is recognized there. The screams of those in hell are so very loud that they absolutely pierce right through the eternal soul. In the very beginning, God breathed into man's nostrils "and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). That soul will be alive a million years from now, somewhere out there in eternity. The Scriptures teach the eternal existence of the soul.

Hell will be a place of guilt and shame. The Prophet Daniel wrote about it in Daniel 12:2, saying, "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." There are some who believe that this "everlasting life" will go on and on. They believe that there will be no end to the joys of Heaven. Yet, when they get to the next part of the verse that says "shame and everlasting contempt," they say that just means for a long period of time. Both times the word *everlasting* is used—"everlasting life" and "shame and everlasting contempt." They come from the exact same Hebrew word. Daniel was describing everlasting life and everlasting contempt.

When the eternal sentence of guilt rings from the throne on Judgment Day, angels will be there to witness it. It will descend like an immense millstone about the necks of the condemned, dragging them down into the burning sea of shame from which there is no hope and there is no return. According to the Word of God, hell is going to last as long as Heaven lasts. If Heaven is to last forever and ever, then hell is going to last forever and ever as well.

Let us go to the New Testament and look at several passages of Scripture that use the words *everlasting* and *eternal*. Every one of these passages uses the same Greek word. (In *Strong's Concordance* it is number 166.) This Greek word means "without end, never to cease, everlasting, and continuous." People who believe in brief punishment claim that this word referring to *hell* only means a long period of time. Thus, the way they would read Matthew 25:46 is like this: "And these shall go away into [a long period of punishment]: but the righteous into life eternal."

The best way to understand what a word means is to see how it is used in other places in the Word of God. Let us look at how the word *everlasting* is used throughout the Bible. Romans 6:22 says, "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." How long is this life? It is *everlasting*.

The same word is used in Romans 16:26, which says, "But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." If the opposers of this truth were right, God Himself would have an end after a long period of time. But we cannot accept that as the people of God.

Look at 1 Timothy 1:17. It reads, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen." The word *eternal* here is the same Greek word that is used in Matthew 25:41 and 46. When Paul, an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, pronounced this beautiful benediction upon the divine Master, he referred to Him as "the King eternal." Now we appeal to all common sense and to reason: if the Apostle Paul, who was a Greek scholar, had known of a word in all of the language that more fully expressed the idea of eternal, would he not have used it in this high and most sublime description of the attributes of Christ? When with all the fullness and fervency of his redeemed soul, Paul wished to describe and give honor and glory to his Divine Redeemer throughout all time and eternity, he ascribed Him as the eternal, invisible, kind and all-wise God. Paul wrote to him "be honour and glory for ever and ever," repeating the words *for ever and ever* for the sake of emphasis. Those words mean exactly the same thing: no end.

Look at 2 Timothy 2:10, which states, "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Once again that is the same word that is found in Matthew, Chapter 25. We read in Hebrews 5:9, "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." If, therefore, this word does not mean eternal, that means our salvation after a long period of time will drop back and we will be in the hands of the devil. I cannot accept that! I believe it means "for ever and ever without end."

We find this word in Hebrews 9:14. It says, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" The writer spoke about the "eternal Spirit," again, the same Greek word that is used in Matthew, Chapter 25. Look at Hebrews 9:15, which says, "And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." I repeat, if the word *eternal* only means for a long period of time, our eternal redemption is not yet secure.

I ask you this question: Will the inheritance that Christ purchased by His death ever come to an end? No, thank God, it will never, ever come to an end! Second Peter 1:11 says, "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." If Christ's kingdom were to finally come to an end, where is there any hope for the righteous beyond this period of time? Thank God, according to the Book of Daniel this kingdom has no end. It was established to stand forever and ever. Therefore, we realize and understand exactly what this Greek word means.

If this Greek word does not mean eternal, if it only means a long period of time and the wicked will not be punished forever, then God and Christ, His Kingdom, redemption, and inheritance and everything else which the Bible describes as "unending existence" is going to come to an end and the Bible is a lying Book, from the Book of Genesis all of the way through to the Book of Revelation. However, every true Christian shrinks with horror from such an implication and cries out from the depths of his heart, "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4). I believe, without a doubt, the word means unending, forever and ever. That is what Heaven is going to be like. The dear old song *Amazing Grace* describes it like this: "*When we've been there ten thousand years . . . we've no less days to sing God's praise, Than when we first begun.*" After ten thousand years, we will have only just begun to share the praises of God.

The eternity of the lost is the same as the eternity of the saved. Let us study a little further to see if the word is used to express the eternal existence of such things as God and the kingdom also applies to the wicked. I believe just a few texts will be sufficient. Verse 41 of our text speaks of "*everlasting* fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Here *everlasting* is the same Greek word that is used to describe God and the kingdom as being eternal. If you are going to say that the punishment of the wicked does not last forever, you are going to have to say that God does not last forever. And who wants to blaspheme in that manner?

As we continue reading our text, verse 46 states, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." Here the same Greek word is used. Where in all of the Bible is there a more clearly stated rule or fact? (To deny that the punishment of the wicked will continue as long as the life of the righteous and both coexist with the existence of God is a direct contradiction to the Word of God.)

Friend, it is unreasonable to assume there is an eternal Heaven but not an eternal hell. Eternal punishment is as much a truth in God's Word as the eternal rewards of the righteous. The everlasting gates that let the blessed into happiness are forever shut against all who enter into hell. The eternal destiny of hell and the eternity of Heaven are spoken of in the very same language. The same words used to talk about the eternity of the saints are used to talk about the eternity of the damned.

The threatenings of eternal punishment are more numerous than the promises of eternal happiness. The punishment of the wicked and the life of the righteous are spoken of in the exact same chapter and verse. The same words that tell how long Heaven will last also tell how long the punishment of the wicked will last. We challenge any man anywhere to deny these facts that we are bringing to you from the Word of God.

Some are of the opinion that the punishment will have an end. This is as unrealistic as believing that the glory of the

righteous will have an end, for the same word is used to express the duration of the punishment and the duration of the state of Glory. According to the Word of God, as long as God Himself exists and as long as He has dominion and a kingdom, the wicked will suffer in hell. The reward and the punishment are both eternal.

Let us look at another Scripture. Matthew 18:8-9 says: "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into *everlasting* fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire." Everlasting fire is eternal and unending fire. This is one clear text in the Bible that teaches an endless hell.

In Mark 3:29 the Bible says, "But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation." Once again, this verse uses the exact same Greek word. The flames of damnation will wrap the sinner's soul in shrouds of eternal misery.

Let us look at another strong Scripture found 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." This punishment is everlasting destruction, not a destruction that would wipe one out of existence, as the heathen vainly hope, but an eternal separation from God and a deprivation of His approving smile and favor throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.

Sinner friend, hell is a place of no escape. The thought of no escape is as bad as the suffering itself. Oh, the mental suffering, knowing that you procrastinated, knowing that you put off your salvation! You had planned to get saved, to get right with God. Consider what it would be like to suffer in hell immeasurably, without hope of an escape through death or any other means, wishing to die and not being able to die, suffering forever and ever, with no hope of being annihilated. I do not know how you feel about it, but that is more than my mind can fathom. Oh, the desperation that comes from knowing that those who enter there have not one ray of hope, no chance of ever leaving! That is enough to crush the poor soul. Why? They will become a forgotten people in a forgotten place when God turns away and disclaims ownership of the soul. Their doom will be complete.

Jude put it like this in verses 7 and 21: "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. . . . Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." There is no need for an eternal fire if there is not eternal punishment. I had someone tell me that the fire will last forever, but not the punishment. How foolish would that be? Why have an everlasting fire if the punishment did not last forever? The fire of God's wrath will be an everlasting fire, a fire that is fastening and preying upon immortal souls, a fire that can never go out for want of fuel, a fire being kindled and kept burning by the wrath of an immortal God. This fire can never go out.

Now, I do not claim to be a Greek scholar, but I do not believe that any Greek scholar can pretend that the Greek word that we have been studying (number 166 in the *Strong's Concordance*) means anything less than eternal. Impenitent sinners in hell will have end without end, death without death, night without day, mourning without mirth, sorrow without solace, bondage without liberty. The damned will live as long in hell as God Himself will live in Heaven. People get mixed up today because so many in our religious world are trying to fashion a god to suit themselves. People create a god that would not let anyone suffer in hell. But the true God of the Bible makes it clear—hell is an eternal place for all who reject Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

There is a possibility of being dead and being alive at the same time. It is difficult to explain how it is that you can be dead and yet exist and feel pain in hell. Death is separation from God, and God is the source of all life. Souls in hell live forever, yet they are disconnected from the source of life. Mark it down, friend, all the ways of hell are one-way streets. The idea that those who go there will eventually be released and join the rest of humanity over in Glory has not a shred of biblical evidence.

The passage of Scripture in Mark 9:43-48, the Bible's best description of hell, comes from the lips of our blessed Lord. So terrible is the pain that Jesus recommended the loss of a hand, foot, or eye in preference to being consigned to this terrible place. Notice the same words repeated: "that never shall be quenched" (verse 43); "and the fire is not quenched" (verse 44); "the fire that never shall be quenched" (verse 45); "and the fire is not quenched" (verse 46); "and the fire is not quenched" (verse 48). Five times the Divine Teacher who came from God declared that men who are unwilling to give up their cherished idols and their sins will go into hell, which is defined as "a fire which is not and never shall be quenched."

If we believe the testimony of Jesus Christ, we understand that this fire will be perpetual. "Never quenched" means that it will burn forever. The fire burns so long and so violently that all the waters of the sea could never quench it. Hell is eternal, for it is spoken of in words never used but to denote eternity. The fire department cannot put out this fire. There is nothing that can put out this fire. This fire shall never be quenched. Why would the fire continue forever if no one is in that fire? The

fact is, there are people in that fire. To further emphasize that its punishment will have no end, three times over the Lord Jesus Christ said that in this place "their worm dieth not" (Mark 9:44, 46, 48).

What did Jesus mean when He said, "If thy hand offend thee . . ."? He was not talking about literally cutting off hands, cutting off feet, or plucking out eyes; but He was saying if something or someone as useful as a hand be an occasion of sin and there is no other way to shun it, cut it off. Suffer physical pain rather than to go into a devil's hell. "And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell . . ." (Mark 9:45). Jesus was not speaking literally, but symbolically. It is better to suffer frightful pain than to be cast into the tortures of this burning fire.

"And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire" (Mark 9:47). Friend, if a person or a thing as dear as your eye offends you (in other words, hinders you from running the race that is set before you), pluck it out. It is better to endure indescribable anguish, even to afflict it upon yourself, than to go with both eyes into the torment of desolation. Jesus said if your eye would keep you from being saved, it would be better to rip it out of its socket than to have both eyes and be cast into hell.

Again, Jesus was not teaching self-immolation as a means of dealing with sin. Why? You could pluck your eye out and still have lust in your heart. You could still be envious of other individuals. Jesus was warning us that whatever it takes, no matter how radical, we should rid our lives of all sin, because sin is what leads individuals to a devil's hell. In other words, it is better to lose the things in this life that are nearest and dearest to you than to lose your soul in a devil's hell.

What does the devil have to offer you that is worth more than your never-dying soul? There is nothing in all of this life that is worth having if it costs you just one moment in hell. Some say that if they were to get saved, their friends or boyfriend or girlfriend would probably leave them. Sinner, your girlfriend, your boyfriend, the people you hang around with are not worth losing your soul in a devil's hell. And if they are going to turn their backs on you because you got saved, they are not your true friends anyway. You might as well go ahead and get saved and let God give you some good friends who will love you and stick by you.

Some people are afraid that they might lose their position on the job or at school if they were to get saved. No position is worth being lost over. Others say that they might lose their job if they got saved, because they are told to do some things on the job that a Christian could not do. Times are hard right now. How could they make it without that job? Dear friend, your job is not worth losing your soul in a devil's hell. Maybe your wife or your husband has told you if you get saved, he or she will divorce you. Although I am not in any way pushing for divorce, your soul is worth more than your marriage. You would be better off to put God first and let Him work out the rest.

Certainly the words of our Lord show that after death, for those who have sinned and not repented, there will be such intense suffering that the greatest possible present calamity would be preferable to it. Think about it! The greatest possible calamity would be preferable to losing your soul and being lost forever and ever throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.

If you are reading this and you are not saved, I want to reason with you. The Bible says in Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, and let us reason together." Why are you not a Christian? What is the reason or the reasons that you have not given your heart to God? What is that sin, the thing you dread and fear giving up, that cherished idol, that something you think you cannot live without? I ask you, is that thing or that person worth experiencing this place that the Bible calls *hell*? No matter what is standing in your way, it is not worth being lost eternally.

Does the Bible Teach Eternal Punishment?

Part Three

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.

The first thought that we want to deal with in this part is this: Is the fire of hell real or metaphorical? I am sure that the fire mentioned in the Scriptures could also be the fires of unfulfilled desires, the fires of lust, the fires of mental anguish, and the burning memory of foolish decisions made by rejecting Almighty God while the individual was here upon this earth and still had a chance. I am certain hellfire will include this type of burning, but I also believe it is a literal fire as well. However, the only thing of importance is what the Bible states concerning this subject.

Revelation 20:15 says, "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." I believe that fire to be literal. There is no reason to doubt the probability of a real fire. Nothing is more painful and terrible to the body than the torment of real fire.

In Noah's day it was not some mystical or spiritual waters that flooded the earth. No doubt, if a lot of today's theologians would have lived in that day, they would have gone out and worked against Noah, telling the people, "It's not going to be a *literal* flood." But it was a literal flood. Also, the fire and brimstone that rained on Sodom and Gomorrah was not something mystical or spiritual either; it was literal. Luke 17:26-30 says: "And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."

Some might ask: "Will the fire consume our physical body? How could this be real fire, yet never consume?" We have already dealt with this to some degree, but let us look at it further. Exodus 3:2 tells us, "And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." Moses saw a bush literally burning, yet not being consumed. In hell the wicked will burn with fire, but their bodies will not be consumed. It will be chains of darkness, everlasting chains throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.

This leads us to look a little bit at the subject of annihilation. There are a growing number of professing Christians who believe that some people will just be annihilated at the end. This teaching has come about because many people just cannot accept the fact that God would allow people to suffer in hell for all eternity. Annihilationism is the belief that those who have died apart from a saving faith in Jesus Christ will be ultimately destroyed. Thus, the annihilationists reject the historical view of hell's consciousness and endless punishment.

If one believes in annihilationism, he or she must also dismiss the final Judgment. Why would there be a final Judgment if the sinners are going to simply cease to exist? I would like to hear an annihilationist answer as to why he thinks Jesus died. Why did Jesus die to save us if there is no hell to suffer? Why did He go through all that pain and all that suffering if people are going to be annihilated at the end of their lives?

When John the Baptist warned people to flee the wrath to come (Matthew 3:7), he was speaking of the judgment of eternal punishment. I do not believe that people would run from the wrath of God to come if they knew in advance that in the end they were going to be annihilated and cease to exist.

The strongest arguments presented by those who believe in being annihilated are Scriptures like Romans 6:23, which tells us that "the wages of sin is death." They also use Ezekiel 18:4, which warns that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," and James 1:15 where the Bible says, ". . . sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

Those who believe in annihilation argue that death is a state which can be only reached upon a complete extinction of life. However, death does not mean annihilation, utter extinction of being. In the very day that Adam sinned; he died, but he was still alive physically. Was he annihilated that day? Genesis 2:17 says, ". . . thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Adam ate of the fruit of that tree, and he lived on to be 930 years old. Can a person be dead and still living? Most certainly. First Timothy 5:6 tells us, "But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." The prodigal son in that far country was dead; yet, he was living right on. We know this is true for Luke 15:32 reads, "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." Not only is this true of the sinner here in this life, but it will be true in the hereafter.

Those who believe in annihilation, believe that the body will simply cease to exist; they believe that the wicked will be blotted out of existence. However, the opposite of that is actually the truth. We have proved to you, by the Bible, that the

sinner's end is everlasting punishment and eternal damnation.

Let us look at a few other Scriptures along this line. We read in Genesis 15:15, "And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age." Then Deuteronomy 31:16 reads, "Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers." How does one sleep with his fathers if they are gone, if they have been annihilated? Second Samuel 12:23 states: "But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." If an individual that died has ceased to be, then how is it that one could go and be with him?

John 5:28-29 tells us: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." We read in Acts 24:15, "And . . . there shall be a resurrection . . . both of the just and unjust." Concerning those who die lost without God, eternal punishment will not be eternal annihilation. Surely they will not be raised to life at the last day only to be annihilated. That would not make sense. So this eternal separation from God is not annihilation, but it is banishment from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. As to the theory of annihilation, this idea has to be read *into* the text; it cannot be read *from* the text or *out* of the text.

Those who teach an ending hell or a brief punishment of the wicked tell us that the Scriptures speaking of sinners being destroyed or perishing simply mean that they cease to exist; they are annihilated, or blotted out of existence. They reference Scriptures, such as 2 Peter 3:9, where the Bible says, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." They believe that word *perish* simply means "to cease to exist." They also point to Scriptures, such as Psalm 37:38, which says, "But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off."

To be destroyed or to perish does not mean that that individual will cease to exist. This we can prove by plenty of Scriptures in the Word of God. But let us see what the Bible says. Our text says: "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." Here is decisive proof that there is a hell for the body as well as the soul. The torments that await the lost soul will have elements of suffering adapted by the physical as well as by the spiritual part of our nature. Both parts will exist forever, as we have found out from the Bible.

Again, to fully understand a word in the Bible, we need to look at other Scriptures to find how that word is used. We read in Exodus 10:7: "And Pharaoh's servants said unto him, How long shall this man be a snare unto us? let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God: knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?" The Almighty sent awful plagues on the land of Egypt to destroy it, yet Egypt was not blotted out of existence nor was it annihilated. What does the Bible mean when it says that Egypt was "destroyed"? It means that it was ruined.

Proverbs 1:32 says, "For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them." Surely the prosperity of fools does not blot them out of existence. We read in Proverbs 11:9, "An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered." Certainly, this does not mean that the neighbor ceased to exist or was annihilated. An hypocrite can, however, ruin the neighbor's reputation. He can say things that will cast a reflection upon him, thus destroying him. Proverbs 6:32 tells us, "But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul." Does that mean that the adulterer's soul ceased to exist? Does that mean that his soul is annihilated? No, not at all.

Romans 14:15 says: "But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died." Again, this verse does not mean that the brother would cease to exist or be annihilated because of this condition. Hosea put it like this in Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee . . ." They ruined themselves and rendered themselves unfit for service. Not one of them, however, was annihilated. So, we are beginning to see how the word *destroyed* is used in the Bible.

Does this word *destroy* actually mean to be annihilated? Was the nation of Israel wiped out of existence, annihilated when Hosea said, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help" (Hosea 13:9)? By no means. This Scripture simply means that by their sin, by their idolatry, they had destroyed their own peace and happiness and they had deprived themselves of the favor and the blessings of God. Yet, they still existed in their destroyed state. Likewise, through all eternity God's angry frown will rest upon the wicked in the place "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44). Their own memory will remind them that they destroyed themselves; they rendered themselves unfit for service. Yet, none of them will be annihilated. They will endure the vengeance of eternal fire, doomed to eternal existence in unmitigated wretchedness.

Paul wrote in Galatians 1:23, "But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed." Does that word *destroyed* mean the faith was annihilated? No, how could Paul preach something that was no more? The very faith that Paul was preaching was a living faith.

Let us look at two other Scriptures concerning the word *perish*. Jesus said in Luke 13:3, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." This verse does not teach the doctrine of annihilation. While *Webster's Dictionary* does define the word *destroyed* as "to become nothing," he also defines it as "to incur spiritual death, to suffer spiritual and moral ruin." If *perish* means only "to come to nothing and be no more forever," then the righteous will also be blotted out of existence eternally; because the Scripture says in Isaiah 57:1, "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come."

So we find that the words *destroyed* and *perish* in every one of these texts does not mean "to wipe out of existence." Rather, they mean "to deprive the soul of the bliss of God's smile and God's favor." Let us look at it another way. A storm may destroy your crops but not annihilate them. A few years ago Hurricane Katrina came through Mississippi and Louisiana, overturning the buildings and destroying them. We drove down there just a few days before the power was back on in our own home, and we saw how the hurricane had left a path of destruction for hundreds of miles. The building materials were scattered up and across and down that land. Yet, none of those houses and buildings was annihilated. Dear one, that is the way sin will destroy your soul. Then, on the Day of Judgment, you will be sentenced to be punished with everlasting destruction in the flames of fire that never shall be quenched.

As we continue this study, let us look at the thought of *for ever and ever*. What does this term mean? Psalm 125:1 says, "They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." How long is *for ever*? Forever is to have no end. Let us look at a few examples: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever" (Matthew 6:13); "And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:33); "And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever" (John 8:35); "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever" (Romans 11:36); "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom" (Hebrews 1:8); "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

We could go on and on, for there are multiple Scriptures in the Bible that deal with the thought of *for ever and ever*. If we were to continue with additional examples, the majority of people would say, "Yes, that means forever." In all of these many texts and similar expressions, are we not led to believe the positive conclusion that the throne of God, the life of God, the reign of God, and the glory and the honor of God will indeed be forever and unending? Absolutely! We are convinced of that. We positively affirm that the Bible nowhere employs any stronger words to assert the endless existence of God Himself and all that pertain to His eternal kingdom, His life, His glory, than it employs in declaring both the never-ending life of the righteous and the never-ending punishment of the wicked who reject the infinite love and mercy of God.

Next, concerning the future of the wicked, let us read a few verses. Second Peter 2:17 tells us, "These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved [for how long?] for ever." We read in Jude 13, "Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness [for how long?] for ever."

Now to be consistent, we must also accept the fact that the lake of fire is going to be unending and forever. Revelation 20:10 states, "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." Since there is a real hell of torment that lasts forever and ever, I believe that we, as ministers of God, need to warn people against this doctrine of annihilation and the doctrine of brief punishment, because the Bible teaches that hell lasts *for ever*. The rejections that the sinner will suffer in hell will not be something temporary. They are eternal! The sinner in hell will never be able at any time to enter into the presence of God. As long as God reigns on His throne, the wicked will endure the torments of the wicked in hell. The saved and the unsaved will exist *for ever* in a conscious state.

Going to hell will be the result of your choice, or the result of not making the right choice. By failing to choose life, you are already on the road that leads to destruction. Matthew 7:13-14 tells us: ". . . broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Thus, a lack of decision is, in fact, a decision.

We were all on our way to hell until we choose to follow Jesus. It was only then that we got off of the road that led to destruction. From time to time, some sinners have said to me, "Brother Dishman, I don't intend to be lost." I say to those individuals: "Wake up! You are already lost. You do not have to do one more thing to be lost—just keep going the way you are going." Often in court cases if one of the parties does not show up, he loses. The other party wins by default. The definition of *default* in *The New American Heritage Dictionary* is "the failure of one or more competitors or teams to participate in a contest; win by default, or to lose a case by not appearing." *Default* can also mean "failure to act" or "to neglect."

It is so very important to make a decision while you have the chance. The decision of whom you are going to serve has

to be made while the door of mercy is still open. So many fail to understand that they do not get saved when they are ready; they get saved when the Spirit of God is drawing and speaking to them. People in hell will have an eternity to regret their hesitation, to regret thinking that they had more time in this life to consider their choice. Hell will have many people who thought they were still saved, but they were wrong. Only one second after death, they found it was too late to repent.

God is faithful. God warns. Nobody is going to be lost because God was not faithful. Nobody is going to go to hell because God did not care. Nobody is going to go to hell because God did not love them. "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).

I have heard that there are 264 warnings in the New Testament about judgment and hell. There are 27 books in the New Testament, which contain 260 chapters. That means that there is approximately one warning for every chapter in the New Testament. If you were to equate those warnings to actual signs on the highway, with 27 books equaling 27 miles, there would be a signpost every 500 feet. If you were traveling at 60 miles per hour, you would see a warning sign every 6 seconds. Seeing that many signs would get anybody's attention. If, after ignoring all those warnings, someone still drives off the bridge, whose fault is it? So it is spiritually. It is not God's fault.

Dear one, if you ignore all of the warning signs and all of the roadblocks that God has put in your pathway to keep you out of hell, you cannot blame the church, the pastor, or anybody else. You are the one, friend, who failed to acknowledge the warning signals.

There will be no peace in hell; there will be no rest there. There will be nothing but unpleasantness; not one thing desirable will be found in hell. Oh, sinner friend, heed the warning! Hell is one long night. After you have been there for ten million years, the future stretches on and on without any hope. No doubt, there are a million roads that lead to hell, but there is not one road that leads out. The words of Jesus, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire" (Matthew 25:41), will sound in your ears throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. Once the gates of hell are shut, they will never be unbarred. Death, which to many is a monster here on earth, would be an angel in hell. The damned would fall down and worship death. Every tongue would sing, and every heart would shout with the praise of triumph until all was still. But death will not release the sinner from hell. The stripes will fall without remittance. The torment will thunder down in an unending torrent.

In hell the lost will cry for relief, but their cries will be in vain, for they will not be heard. The lost will gnash their teeth forever. They will toss, they will turn, searching endlessly for just a little bit of Heaven, a moment of rest, yet finding absolutely none whatsoever. After ten million years, there will be no end in sight. The torment and the weeping will be continual, and yet the dying will eternally live on. On every chain in hell is written the words *for ever*.

If the news reached hell that sometime out in the future hell would be burned down and those that are there might be saved, a jubilee would take place in hell. But it cannot be. When a thousand million years are passed, the torments of hell will be as fresh as when the individual first began to encounter them. Dear one, there is a part of you and of me that is going to live as long as God does.

In public halls we find signs with four bold letters. They say, "EXIT." But *exit* is a word not found in the vocabulary of hell. Once there, you are always there. Once in, you can never get out. Sinner friend, I beg of you, I plead with you. Open your eyes and look before you enter into a place from which no one has ever returned. If you die without God, if you go into this lost eternity, you will sink into the blackest shades of eternal night. Endless years will drag their slow feet in procession over your tormented soul. In hell you will be eternally dying, but you will never know the relief that death brings. Hell is the eternal home for all who reject Christ.

The fundamental fact about hell is that going there is a choice; it is a decision. Just as those who are saved chose Christ, thus choosing Heaven, unrepentant sinners will go to hell because they chose to go there. Nobody is going to hell by chance. Every individual who lifts his eyes in hell will have gone there because he chose to do so. You might say, "I don't know anybody who would deliberately choose to go to hell, Brother Dishman." The same would be true if I were to ask people: "Do you want to go to hell? Do you want to go to the lake of fire?" The answer would be, "No!" But the decision is not that simple. Hell is a built-in consequence of rejecting Christ. Human beings in their natural state are already alienated from God. They are under the wrath of God. When they refuse to repent, when they refuse His mercy to know, when they refuse His forgiveness, they make their choice.

It is a choice that everyone will have to make. Anyone who chooses to reject Christ forfeits his benefits and incurs the wrath of God. If you do not want God, that means you do not want Heaven and you are choosing hell. So it is either Heaven or hell. It is our choice. The entire purpose of our life is to make the choice. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15). God put it like this in Deuteronomy 30:19: "I have set before you life and death." Dear one, God has set before you life and death, blessings and cursings. Therefore, He said, "choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."

God takes human freedom so seriously that the free human actions are never bypassed in God's dealings with individuals.

Although we are free, we are responsible for our actions, and we must live with the results of our free choices. Dear one, I ask you to consider these thoughts. No earthly wisdom can overthrow these solid truths. If you are one who does not believe in an eternal hell, you are in opposition, not only to the Scriptures, but also to almost all the well-known and highly respected leaders of the past and of the present in the Church of God. You virtually stand alone, with no credible support. Jesus made it so very clear. I do not know how anyone could miss the clear teachings of Jesus. He mentioned hell in forty-six separate verses in the New Testament. No one will go there undeservedly.

Sinner friend, you have the freedom to reject God, but that freedom has eternal consequences. Are you walking in the path that leads to hell? Are you traveling the broad road that leads to destruction? Every sin that you commit is another step of descent to the place the Bible calls hell.

In closing, with the positive knowledge of God's holy truth and the witness of the Holy Spirit, I declare in the presence of God that all teachers of this ending hell and brief punishment of the wicked are the devil's agents, sent to soothe the conscience of the ungodly and encourage them to continue in their sinful lust and reject the great salvation of God. One day they will open their eyes in hell, with all their false teachers, and find that their doom is just what God's Word now says—eternal damnation.

Therefore, we say to all who love God, who love the truth, and have a concern for the salvation of immortal souls, do not help men into their fatal delusion of the devil by circulating the devil's literature. In the name of Jesus, flee from the modern doctrines of the devil and the soothing lies and receive the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. I am convinced the Bible teaches that the punishment of the wicked will last as long as God does.

If we could only fathom what it means to be unsaved, without God, without hope, headed toward the Judgment Bar of God, headed toward an eternal hell. Every sinner would flee to God for a refuge while the door of mercy is still open.