

What About Death And Hell?

Part II



By Philip E. Busby

Question #19 - *"I have been studying the Bible recently regarding death. A lot of questions arose due to me losing my son last year. One particular one is the idea of "heaven" and "hell". What is Hades, Sheol...etc. and I don't believe that my son is in heaven - I believe he is asleep. What does the Bible say about hell? Is it different from the lake of fire? Was it meant for Satan and his angels? What have you learned in studying God's word?"*

In our last segment we began our discussion by talking mostly about terminology and the difficulties it brings to understanding the truth, especially when people do not want the truth. That brought us to a discussion about how badly our thoughts have been distorted and how far back it goes. A continuation of that discussion is where we start this segment of "What About Death And Hell?"

The basic rundown is this: God created man and put him in a garden. Man was in innocence, but he had the choice of staying in innocence or taking of the knowledge of good and evil for himself by eating from the tree which bore that very name. Man chose to take of that fruit. Just as God had warned him, man was not capable of being responsible for this knowledge without failing to be righteous. This forced God to place the judgment of death on man. Now, man could still call on the name of The Lord because God will never leave nor forsake those who seek Him. (Heb. 13:5) Because it is

the will of God that none perish but all come to Him, (II Pet. 3:9) God gave His only Son to create a way out of the mess we are in. (John 3:16) However, just as Adam and Eve chose to turn from God and do what He told them not to, many people through the ages have also chosen to reject God in their lives.

Now, it's important to understand that what man received by taking of the fruit was not wisdom or knowledge about everything; what man received was only the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve had enough problems with just that, anything more may have literally killed them. Man had not even given himself enough time to learn anything about living before he thought he knew enough to take of the tree God told them not to, he certainly was not ready to understand the full dynamics of what it meant to die! So, man brought the judgment of death upon himself before he was even capable of having knowledge which would explain to him what happened to a man after death. To obtain that knowledge, they would have to do what they failed to do in the first place, and that was humble themselves by admitting they did not know and ask God to teach them. (James 4:7-10) Understand that even after man's fall into sin, people were perfectly free to seek God on the matter, but very few have ever chosen to do so. Instead, man has chosen to lean on his own understanding for the answers even when the answers are clearly out of his reach without God. (Prov. 3:5) How does this relate to our subject at hand? It shows us the path which has led man to think in the way he does about death!

Putting aside for just a second the ideas of heaven and hell, try to grasp where man began. Man did not understand death at all. In the beginning man was not intended to face death, so he was in no way built with an understanding of it. Animals and plants live and die all the time, but that is just a natural cycle of the creation. It really is no different from things like the fact day is followed by night and night is followed by day. Ever repeating cycles are the basis of creation, but man was the free-willed being. Man could effect changes, be fruitful; but after the judgment of death came upon us, things changed. From then on, man would not live forever here on this planet; (Gen. 3:22-24) but a fact man did understand, at least at first, is that men do not cycle like the plants and animals. (Job 14:7-10) When a man dies, everything he is does not return to the earth and come back as something else. So, for a very long time the question has been, what happens after the death of the part of us which does return to the ground?

Since many men have not wanted to seek the answer from God, there is a philosophy of men about death

which is not the full truth. Some of the story is created by hints of the truth man did see; some of the story was created by guess work; some of the story was and is created by wishful thinking; and of course, we can't discount the devil's involvement in telling us lies! However, one of the best things you can understand about words such as Hades and Sheol is that both these words have their roots in the idea of things "unseen." Remember what I said earlier about using the words we have? Well, before the Tower of Babel, man was all of one language. This was a great convenience which man abused for evil purposes; and thus, it had to be taken from us. However, it was in this unified language that man developed basic concepts. It was easy to use the rules in this original language to come up with new words and terms which all men would understand. When it came to the concept of what happens to a man after death, men had no clue. So, at first he simply used a word to describe where people went as "unseen." Whatever that original word was, it eventually evolved from that original concept of man simply saying he did not know, to being the description of what man did not know. It became a name, and the word took on a life of its own!

If that doesn't make sense, let's look at an example of this kind of metamorphosis. Again, in older languages there were rules for developing a word which carried a meaning. This is best seen in the idea of human names. Today we see many names, and people will talk about what their name means. Why? Because names are often a description of something packed into one word! For example, my name is Philip. Now, it's not clear how old this name may be, but the form we are familiar with today comes from Greek. Philip means "Lover of Horses." This is the basis of calling individuals by name. Adam started us off by calling his wife Eve. Why? Because she was the mother of all living. (Gen. 3:20) The Bible shows us this in many cases. People, because they were in a certain situation or place, or because they felt the child had a specific task ahead, would use a word to denote certain things and name their child that word.

Names are also a good example of how weak English is. When English speaking Europeans came over to the Americas, attempts were made to translate native American languages into English. In the day and age of weak languages, we often find ourselves with no words to translate words with compound meanings, like names. This is why my name is Greek. There is no English word, nor are there rules to create an English word which simply means "Lover of Horses." So, the Greek was simply maintained. This works fine in English because many European languages have their roots, at least in

part, in Greek; but when the Europeans came to what was for them a "New World," the languages were quite different. Many people found it hard to pronounce native names, so instead of carrying the names over into English and trying to pronounce them, they often took the lazy route and simply called the person what the name meant. Ironically, this to many Europeans made native people seem dumb. They thought it was funny that native people, instead of having names, were called things like Sitting Bull and Flying Eagle. This same translation problem showed up when native people tried to speak English. The sluggishness caused by trying to translate what they wanted to say into such a weak and unexpressive English, caused many to believe natives were dull minded. When in fact, it was the childishness of the European's language which caused the problem!

Now, getting back to our subject at hand, this was the way a word for the afterlife developed. Man said, "We do not know what lies beyond this life"; therefore, to the living death is "The Unseen." A word was created to express this, but man did not leave it at that. No, man had to develop a theology to explain the unseen, and since man is very fleshly minded, he thought in terms of time and space. This meant man had to "go" to a "place." The word for the unseen would become the name for that "place" man would "go." How would they determine where this place was. Well, the answer is really quite juvenile. Not to be morbid, but when a person dies, their physical body does go through the same thing animal and plant bodies go through. This is what God told man would happen, "...for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Genesis 3:19 No one in their right mind wants to watch this process. (John 11:39-40) So, the simplest answer for what to do is to put the body in the ground. "Out of sight, out of mind!" This tradition of putting bodies in the ground brought most cultures to see the place where we go after death as under the earth or inside the earth. This is where we get the concept of an "underworld." From there, many elaborate thoughts and ideas arose across the world about the going and about the place.

In another clear sign that we are very fleshly minded, many cultures believed the preservation of the body was critical to a happy afterlife. The Egyptians probably show us this to the highest degree. This is why they mummified their dead, particularly people who were considered important in life. In many cultures, servants and even pets of rulers, would be killed at the same time as the ruler's death so the ruler could take them with him. Then all of them were often put in an elaborate tomb of some form. This kind of false beliefs have infected

Christian doctrine as well. Many Christians believe preserving the body after death or, at the very least, allowing the body to take a more natural course of deterioration is somehow crucial to the resurrection of Christians. This is where the mixing of man's ideas and Biblical truth confuse people.

You see, the bottom line is that man believes there is a place where the dead must go. Some believe there is a separation between those who are "good" and those who are "bad." Some believe we all go to the same place; but the crucial element that trips up those who attempt to understand the truth is that the Bible makes it clear we will, both good and bad, all stand before God. By mixing man's stories with the truth, people get very confused. The pagan thought tells us we have to go somewhere where we can walk the same physical time line the living are going through. Because the Bible does not teach this philosophy, we lean on the false ideas of man to explain a "Christian" version of this place. Through this, Satan often becomes like the Greek god Hades and he is viewed as the ruler in/of the underworld we often call hell, where the wicked "go." Many then wonder where hell is or simply believe it's like the pagan stories - under or inside the earth. Then when we take our story back to the Bible truth of Judgment Day, we find ourselves asking the question, "Is hell the same place as the Lake of Fire?" The truth is, you will get nowhere trying to congeal all these ideas, and why should you? The truth is the truth, and the rest are all stories of men which were originally designed to lead us away from the truth! (Rom. 8:5-9)

Again, the Bible uses words and terms because language can be very limiting; but the first clue that the Bible is not telling the same story as man's false religion is the fact the Bible does not tend to use the same term or word in all cases. Jesus did not use the same words all the time when He spoke in the original language; and because the translators of the King James Bible were led of The Holy Spirit in their work, they did not even use the word "hell" in all the places they could have. This was not a translation miscue, this was led of God, and it shows us there is a truth God is attempting to explain to us which is not the thoughts of man. This is why we see the words "grave" and "outer darkness." These words are trying to bring us back to the truth that man does not understand what happens to a person when they die! These words carry into English, in the best way possible, the fact there is an unseen or unknown aspect to death. The problem is what we do not understand we tend to fear greatly, but that was the point God was/is trying to make. We only have to fear the unknown part if we enter

it without a relationship with God or what the Bible calls "faith!" Over and over I repeat in my writings that faith is simply the description of a relationship with God. However, the churches' insistence that faith is blind belief has corrupted the meaning of the word "faith." Thus, we see another terminology problem.

Sure, there are things we do not understand or know. There are things we will never understand or know, but that does not mean God does not desire for us to understand and know! It simply means we have not come to a place in our relationship where we do understand or know. I remember as a child knowing that multiplication and division were part of the mathematics I would have to learn, but I did not understand them until I was taught. I did not even understand them after the very first time I had them explained to me, but in time, I grasped the concept. When I did, a whole new door was opened for me to move forward and understand more complicated mathematics. This is how life works, and this is why God started us in innocence with a free will. What we choose to learn, and when we choose to learn it, is a big part of our ability to freely be who we choose to be! However, it also means we can all be at different places in our understanding of things. So, when God talks about death, as well as new life, He uses terms and stories we can relate to. Such an example exists in the story where we get the term "born again."

In John chapter 3, Nicodemus was seeking answers from Jesus about life and death. Jesus said we must be born again. Nicodemus concludes the obvious fleshly idea, and asks how a person can re-enter their mother's womb and be born again. However, that was not what Jesus was saying. Jesus was attempting to explain the resurrection in terms we might be able to relate to, but He was not talking about being born from our mother once again. He used the term because we understand what it is to be born of our mother. Today, we see the whole process as very scientific, from conception all the way through to that first breath. Nicodemus may not have had such a scientific view on the matter, but he still understood the simplicity of how our physical form enters the world! So, from Nicodemus right up to this very day, Jesus' term has a chance of registering in our minds. However, instead of going with that simple understanding of talking about our physical form, the church has distorted what Jesus was trying to explain by making it some mystical spiritual concept about accepting Christ and becoming a "Born Again Christian" in the here and now. Making things about the here and now is a very pagan mindset which many in the church will not let go of!

Jesus was using a physical term to help us understand our physical need. He was trying to explain that after these bodies are gone, we will need a new body to be whole again. Nicodemus could not understand how the process of physical rebirth could take place because he was only thinking in terms of man's choices and abilities. Jesus was not amazed, as many teachers teach, that Nicodemus was thinking about the flesh, but that Nicodemus was not thinking about the power of God, especially considering Nicodemus was supposed to be a teacher in Israel. This earthly mindset meant Nicodemus was not going to grasp a very deep explanation of the dynamics of rebirth that night. So, instead of a very deep and insightful conversation about the resurrection, Jesus has to go back to basics (Heb. 5:10-14) and simply tell Nicodemus that God can do things which we do not yet understand. When we are born in this flesh, it is the choice of man; but if we are born again, it will be by the direct hand of The God who created man in the first place. Simply put, if God could form a physical body for us to walk this world, it's no great task for God to form a new and incorruptible body for the next. (Phili. 3:20-21) This is what Jesus meant when He said "Marvel not..."

Now, why was Nicodemus concerned with death? Because he understood that fact we talked about before. Man is not like the plants and animals. His body may go back into the ground, but man is more than flesh! This is where we need to lay to rest the issue about our bodies. Some Christians like to say the part you see is not really them but only a shell. This is untrue. The flesh is very much a part of you. In fact, you cannot be complete without that part of you. However, this flesh which is part of us right now, is where sin resides. Why? Because everything I can do to harm you, or God, is done through the flesh. My mind may want to hurt you and my spirit may desire to harm you in some way, but they will have to go through my body to do it. I cannot touch you except by using my body. I cannot talk to you unless I use my body. I can't even glare at you without using my body. This means every sin that exists in this life can be solved by allowing the body to die!

Adam and Eve could not have taken of the fruit God told them not to if they had not had hands to reach out with. It is our actions which fail to be righteous. Now, God is not tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man. (James 1:13) God is out of our reach when it comes to our unrighteousness. The real problem is that God's creation is not. As long as I live in this universe I can harm you with my physical touch, my words, and your ability to see my actions. This is why I John 2:16 says the common things of man are the lust of the flesh, the lust

of the eye, and the pride of life. There are those things our flesh wants because it wants it. There are things our flesh wants because we are affected by the world around us, which very much has to do with the actions of others (both good and bad); and we are affected by the fact we have life itself. That is to say, we have freedom of motion. The plants and animals, sun, moon, planets, and stars all do what they do according to the design God put into motion, but humans do what they choose in all things!

Once the body is gone, we lose all this. The flesh does not - nor can it - want anything, anymore! This is one of the reasons God allows us to experience sickness. When we get sick we often lose things like our desire to eat, and enjoyment of any number of activities we usually desire. If we get sick enough, we often lose the will to even get out of bed! This is just a small glimpse into death, and it's a simple fact we need to understand because it's better for us to understand the temporalness of this life and turn from it, than it is to simply enjoy this life and go out into eternity having focused only on this life! (Matt. 5:29-30)

Once we lose these physical forms, not only do we lose the ability to take actions which affect others, we lose the ability to be tempted by the actions of others. We no longer have to worry about the fact everyone else is doing it! Death also takes from us the pride of life. Without a physical form, we do not have the ability to do anything. This is why Jesus used the term "outer darkness" and said, "...there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 25:30 Again, we do not have eyes to weep or teeth to gnash. Jesus was simply attempting to speak to carnal minded people using fleshly illustrations to show the emotional state of being without a body!

God was not joking when He said, "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Genesis 3:19 This body is of this earth. It's a vital part of who you are, but it will not last. There is nothing you can do to change that fact. Even receiving Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour will not change that fact, and that is a good thing! Many do not understand this, but death is a release from sin. Because of the facts we just talked about, one could say that if every human died, human sin would cease, and the problems people like to ask about would be solved. People ask why does God allow sickness, war, hunger, and general suffering? The answer is, He only allows it for a season! If it had been God's intent to force Himself on our choices so much that He could stop all our suffering, He would not have made us a free-willed

being in the first place. He would not have given us the opportunity to take of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. We would be no different than the animals. Our actions would be pre-designed, and we would not truly be individuals.

This shows another difference between man's philosophies and the truth. A Buddhist "master" once visited a waterfall and was struck by the fact the water was all one steam until it came to the cliff. As the water came over the edge, it broke into millions of individual droplets as it fell. Once those droplets reached the bottom, they all became part of one stream again. The Buddhist said this is life. He said we are all one, then for just a moment in this universe, we become individuals just like those water droplets; but upon death, we all become one again. Ahhh! Isn't that nice? Well it's not the truth, but it is Hades. The idea, once again, that we are all collected into some place after death (a common place), that all life is the same, that God doesn't send good people to hell, are all things which rise in our minds because we do not want to face the truth that this life will pass by leaving behind the part of us which is flesh. This flesh must eternally be left behind in order for us to even have the opportunity to be "born again," and though we have all come from God, we will not congeal into one stream again. We will all stand before God as individuals responsible for the choices we have made. How's that for the pride of life?

In the book of Revelation, John tells us this heaven and earth passes away. (Rev. 21:1) Jesus told us this as well. (Matt. 24:35) This physical form which is made from the dust of this world will pass away with it. Think about it. Everything physical - which is mostly what we understand - will simply cease to exist, and all that will be left of this creation will be the parts of us which were not part of the heavens and earth which God created "In the beginning..." In this beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, but in the end, all of that will pass away! When that happens, John tells us, humans will stand before God for judgment! (Rev. 20-21) Even this is explained to us in terms we can understand, for the judgment is called a "day." (Matt. 12:36) However, time as we know it will not exist at that point. There will be no sun, no moon, no earth rotating on its axis. The universe will not just be void and without form, the light God created for it will not be separated from the dark, our universe and all its elements will simply be gone. That is why death is such an unknown thing for us. Existing outside of this created time and space is not something we truly grasp, but it is the answer to your question!

When in ministry you work with teens, they love to come up with questions they can have fun with. One of the questions kids like to ask is, "If God has always existed why didn't He create us sooner?" The problem is, this is not a relevant question. God does not live in time like we know it. God does not just know the future of our existence because He is a good guesser. He knows because He can see it all. This is something we do not understand because, as we see it, the future does not exist until we do it. However, there is a part of us which does see beyond; and this is why science fiction writers - as they are called - like to write stories about time travel. The idea that there is a time line of events which can be exited and re-entered at another point has often been the dream of man. Now, I do not personally believe we can ever build a machine which could time travel, but the truth that we live in a fishbowl of time - so to speak - is true. Our universe is about physical space which God created. It exists because God said so. It will cease to exist when God says so. Genesis tells us, in the beginning the earth was void and without form. This is to say the world and the universe were not organized as yet. So, one of the first things God does is speak light into existence, then God divides the light from the darkness. This creates a repeating cycle of day and night. It is this cycle of day and night which creates the basis of time as we know it. God does not live in this cycle, He created it; and it is, for lack of a better way of saying it, a physical thing!

Now, where did our flesh come from? The dust of this earth. Our physical form is part of the materials which will pass away someday. If there are no humans living in this universe, there is no need for its further existence. I cannot stress that point enough because it tells us that even if there were an underworld, it would not be an eternal place; and that brings us to the point! Our bodies do not go to a hell or a comfortable place to await resurrection. Our bodies will not be thrown into the Lake of Fire. Our bodies go to the grave: which is to say they are reabsorbed by the earth. Which means our bodies are not awaiting anything! Our bodies are made from dust and to it they will return!

In our next segment we will look at what is left once we have lost these physical forms, and what happens to us from there. Until then, I pray you will learn to continually trust in The Lord with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding!