

Belief in Satan and Hell Linked to Greater Stress

According to a study conducted earlier this year with over 3,000 adults from England, people who believe in the Devil and Hell are linked to higher stress levels and weaker coping skills. This study demonstrates that in today's world, some would tell us that the concept of hell is emotionally harmful, and anything that causes fear, guilt, or stress, should be removed from our lives. Some have concluded that the concept of Hell would be unfair, so they explain it away. I suppose others think that if they ignore it, maybe it will not happen.

Heaven and Hell are fundamental Bible concepts that can't be ignored. What does the Bible say about the condition of those who end up in Hell? Jesus explained the parable of the tares saying, His angels *"...will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire."* (Matthew 13:41-42). In the parable of the talents, Jesus said, *"And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 25:30)

How can it be fire and darkness at the same time? God has used terms that we are familiar with to present a picture in our minds of a terrible place. The comparison to fire is more than likely a metaphor being used to convey the message to us about a place that we have never seen. We do not have to understand it literally to get the picture of a place that we should avoid at all costs.

The Bible states that Heaven and Hell are places that will last without an end. Any argument that will shorten the time in one will do so in the other. *"And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life"* (Matt. 25:46). The words translated here as "everlasting" and "eternal" both come from a same Greek word, which means "eternal, everlasting, without end, never to cease." So, whatever length of time it means for one place, it must mean the same for the other. I haven't heard of anyone that is interested in finding arguments to put a time limit on the reward of the righteous in Heaven, but some have tried to do so regarding Hell. They conclude that it isn't fair to punish someone for eternity who was only disobedient for a few years of their life. If that's the case, then it is wrong to take a person who was obedient for just a few years of life and reward them in Heaven forever! The fact is that punishment for a crime is based on the severity of the act and not on how long it took to commit the crime. We need to understand how bad our sins against a holy God really are. If we live many years or just a couple of weeks in opposition to God, and then die in that condition, the punishment in Hell forever will be exactly what we deserve.

Yes, the thought of hell can be sobering. It should be. Sin has consequences. But rather than causing hopeless anxiety, the reality of hell should lead us to obedience and gratitude toward God. He has made a way of escape through Jesus. If you are refusing to deal with sin, or you have been ignoring the gospel, the thought of Hell might cause lasting stress. However, when we obey God and live as he has prescribed, we do not have to live in fear but rather, hope. Instead of denying Hell or just refusing to think about it, be thankful for the gospel that has the power to save us from going there. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."* (Romans 8:1)

- by Josh McCord

Don't Forget!

Advanced age activates avowed antagonism against avid and aggressive activity. About the only thing folks my age exercise is caution. But, don't fall for Satan's line that old folks are more forgetful than young folks. Sure, old folks forget trivial things like dates, names, where they put their glasses, etc. But young folks forget vital things, like death, that old age is coming, and most important of all ... that they really don't "own" anything; they are merely stewards of things granted them by God. When you lose your false teeth, or specks, you'll finally stumble on to them somewhere in life's clutter. But, when you forget that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof" (I Cor. 10:26) and go strutting around like you really "owned" earthly possessions ... only death, literal or spiritual, will open your eyes to the fact that you don't.

- by Dwayne Laws

Proving Oneself

In writing about the qualifications of deacons, Paul said that they ought to "first be proved" (1 Tim. 3:10). His point is obvious. Before a man should be appointed to serve in this special office in the church, he should have demonstrated his faithfulness, his zeal and his commitment to serve the Lord. The church does not need someone who has to be specially recognized before he does any work. It needs a man who is already working - and who will continue to work whether he receives any recognition or not.

While Paul was specifically speaking about deacons in the text cited, there are some things implied that have application to all Christians:

1 - First, you should realize that you are currently establishing a reputation. Others in the congregation are viewing your work and service. They are developing an opinion of you. As they think of you, they will see you as either a steady worker or as a mere spectator in the work of the church. Which will it be?

2 - If it is right to hold potential deacons up to this kind of scrutiny, why would it not also be proper to use the same approach regarding folks who might be selected for other roles in the church? Preachers, Bible class teachers, those who serve in the public worship, etc., all need to "first be proved."

3 - And, while some will complain about this kind of "judging," it is clear that the Lord expects us to do it (John 7:24). If you want to serve, then you must be willing to "first be proved."

And so, Christian, how are you doing? As your brothers and sisters look to you do they see someone who is "proving" himself as a faithful disciple? Such evaluations ARE taking place continually. How do you rate? Think!

- by Greg Gwin