

Health and Well Being for All

Recent headlines present the Bible-believing Christian with a wealth of points to ponder. The declining economy of Western nations, wearisome civil war in Bosnia and prospects of peace in the Middle East are just a few current events leading to the fulfillment of prophecy. But two seemingly unrelated news items especially caught our attention. One is the National Health Reform bill and the other, an insidious insight into hell.

National Health Insurance

President Clinton's idealism and enthusiasm are nurturing the work of national health reform. Though we do not agree with all of Mr. Clinton's positions, we do appreciate the fact that he has thrown himself so energetically into serving the needs of the people he leads. For his personal sacrifices of time and energy—he has our respect. The basic idea of health reform, medical care for all Americans, is an excellent one. The majority of Americans feel that health care for all is humane and just.

Daily, the need for national health care is becoming more painfully obvious. Too often common people are faced with the uncommon experience of losing health insurance. Businesses large and small are reeling from the current economic crunch. In order to cope they are either laying off thousands of workers or reducing, even canceling, the health benefits employees formerly took for granted. Every day wrenching news stories of uninsured families stricken with a catastrophic illness and medical bills amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars reach our ears—and hearts. The burdens of such debts have driven many to despair.

Such suffering arouses tender concern in most people, and should definitely touch the hearts of God's people. The benevolent spirit manifested in the health reform plan is heart warming. The human race needs comfort. Remove the gloss of television's entertaining fantasies and the short-lived comforts of materialistic pursuits and a basic truth is revealed. That truth is that the human race has groaned and travailed in pain together throughout history and, truly continues to suffer today. Wars, disease, crime, drugs, old age, poverty, physical abuse, prejudice, loneliness and many other woes have not left a single person on this planet unaffected. This fact leads us to appreciate every just effort to alleviate human suffering in life's brief season.

Yet, while some are calculating the means to comfort this short life, others have calculated the probability of eternal conscious torture for most Americans—and for the world! What a contrast!

Headlines Cause Heated Response

The New York Times (Monday September 20, 1993) reported that Southern Baptists are receiving intense criticism for a report published on the front page of Alabama's The Birmingham News. That report was a county-by-county breakdown of who was bound for eternal salvation or eternal damnation. The Southern Baptists have calculated that 46.1 percent (1.86 million) of Alabama's citizens are bound for an eternity of hell's unimaginable horrors. Intense furor rose in Alabama.

National figures were also calculated by the Southern Baptists but, presently, are not going to be made available. We don't wonder at this. If 46.1 percent of a Bible-belt state's population is probably "unsaved," many more may be considered "unsaved" in the other states. The national numbers of those the Southern Baptists believe will be eternally lost would raise a tremendous controversy.

An Emotional Issue

Merely mentioning hell raises intense emotions. Perhaps it is fear that, for the most part, causes many to respond so frenetically. But, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." And "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 John 4:18 In full love and trust we come to the Lord through His Word. A topical study of hell and other related subjects (immortality in particular) gives us a Biblical concept of hell dramatically different from the concept taught through the dark ages.

Sources of Thought

Reading any objectively written history of Christianity will reveal the source for much of what we once considered the teachings of Scripture. That source of thought was primarily focused through one man—St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. Augustine was a brilliant man who ardently admired the doctrines of Plato (the noted Greek philosopher) and the Neoplatonists. Their ideas of good and evil, of the "immortal soul" and of eternal punishment greatly appealed to Augustine's fertile mind. However, Augustine also fell in love with the Bible and its story of God's Anointed One—Jesus Christ.

It was unfortunate that he did not choose one or the other. Augustine's genius was able to fuse the simple faith of the Bible with the philosophical ramblings of the Greeks. The pagan Greeks viewed the cross of Christ as foolishness. Despite their great philosophical "wisdom" they did not know God! (see 1 Corinthians 1:21-23) Yet, when the foundations of orthodoxy in Christian doctrine were established, Augustine embraced the teachings of pagan Greeks as the guidelines. Confusion has reigned ever since.

Despite Luther's bold declaration against the immortality of the soul (point 27 of the 95 Theses), the other Reformation leaders embraced Augustine's Grecian philosophy. Luther's Biblical truth on the "soul" was lost to and in the Protestant Reformation. This sort of theology became the intellectual weapon of church scholars by which they ruled the ignorant masses—in fear. Today we are able to read the Bible in simple faith, trusting that the words actually mean what they say.

Scriptures On "Immortal Soul"

There are no Scriptures using the phrase "immortal soul." We must turn to Plato if we want information on that. The Bible teaches that immortality is conditional. That is, if we want it, we may obtain it on certain conditions. We must be Jesus' disciples. Immortality will be given "to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life." "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." Romans 2:7; 1Corinthians 15:53

Those who do not seek for immortality continue under the sentence of death pronounced upon Adam. The death sentence is the wrath of God. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 1:18

Those who die go to sheol—the Hebrew word translated hell, grave and pit in our Bible. A concise definition of sheol is framed by this scripture, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave [sheol], whither thou goest." Ecclesiastes 9:10

The point is that if human beings really are dead they know nothing. They feel nothing. They do nothing. The "unsaved" (another word we don't find in the common version of the Bible) do not experience eternal conscious torture. They experience death—the cessation of existence. Even many of Christ's disciples would experience the condition of death. Paul, speaking of brethren who had seen Jesus after his resurrection, noted that "He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep." 1 Corinthians 15:6

When would they be raised from the dead? At the second advent of Christ. "For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever." 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 (NRSV)

Heaven—By Invitation Only

The call to become one of Christ's body members is not being extended to everyone. The scriptures speak of God's invitation to the heavenly spiritual reward as "the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14 The invitation is selective. God's saints are noted in the book of Revelation as being "called, and chosen, and faithful." Revelation 17:14 We thank our God, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." 2Timothy 1:9

The Destiny of the Majority

While the scriptures clearly teach the present election of comparatively few, this does not imply that the rest of the groaning creation has been cast off by an uncaring God. Those who do not go to heaven as members of the body of Christ will not suffer eternal agony. Neither will they pass out of existence eternally—doomed or forgotten by God. It is Satan who desires mankind to believe that God would condemn a living creature to an eternity of suffering, without hope of ever being freed, for whatever sins they committed during their threescore and ten years on earth.

Mankind will experience a call to God's kingdom on earth when Christ reigns over it. "And the Spirit [Jesus] and the bride [his church] say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Revelation 22:17

God's grace to the few who are called with this holy calling is wonderful. In speaking of this grace, Paul gives us a clue as to the purpose of the call. "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)" 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 The Greek language reads "now is an accepted time, behold, now is a day of salvation." The Christian era is not the only day of salvation nor the only acceptable time. Proof of this is supplied by the scriptures themselves.

Paul quoted Isaiah 49:8-10 "Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them."

Those that Paul urges to receive the grace of God not in vain are Christians. These are given, by God, "for a covenant of the people." That covenant will provide the rest of

mankind an opportunity to be freed from the prison-house of death. It will lead the willing and obedient to the waters of life eternal as human beings. If we are faithful to our Lord we shall reign with him. The privilege of helping to deliver the groaning creation from the bondage of sin and death will be ours—as kings and priests over the earth. That is the purpose of our heavenly calling. (What a marvelous solution to the question of universal health care!) What a great vindication of the righteous character of our God.
Romans 8:16-21

"And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful." Revelation 21:3-5
For a detailed study of the scriptures on hell and immortality send for the 105 page booklet *Where Are The Dead*.