

News & Notes

Sunday, March 20, 2005

Remember in Prayer: Sally Etta Crawford; Tommy Dawson; Terrel Ford is at home recovering from surgery; Mary Kidd; Deliah Mann; Howard Moody; Shirley Ortiz has been sick; Janet Rooker, sister of Tommy Dawson has been ill; Diana Shaver, sister-in-law to Shawna Northrop has slipped discs in her back; Ruby Street; Shad Street, co-worker of Sam Ford has been having back trouble; Stephanie Tatum, granddaughter of Melvin and Margie Bennett had a tonsillectomy on March 17th; Calvin and Ollie Ursery; Sharon Walker, sister of Frank Walker is scheduled to have surgery on the 30th; Alvie Williford.

The **monthly youth devotional** is tonight after services at the home of Carrol and Annette Street.

Young Adults bowling is scheduled for April 2. Please mark your calendars and plan to participate.

Gospel meetings start today at the Theo and Chapman congregations. Check the bulletin board for details.

Sermon In Preview:

AM: Worship: The Avenue of Contribution (1Corinthians 16:2).

PM: 3rd Week Singing.

For the Record (March 13, 2005):

Attendance: 67 Contribution: \$1656.00 Budget: \$1205.00

The Ashland Church of Christ

P. O. Box 25

Ashland, MS 38603-0025

ashlandcoc@juno.com

Sunday:

Bible Study 9:30 AM

Worship 10:30 AM

Worship 6:00 PM

Wednesday:

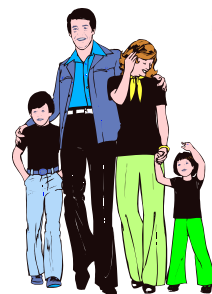
Bible Study 7:00 PM

Shepherds:

Barney King

Junior Roberson

Carrol Street



The Ashland Announcer

*"Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
Give to the Lord glory and strength" (Psalm 96:7).*

Hell Or Annihilation

Paul N. Merideth

At the turn of the century, in 1899, the Lord's church faced a variety of challenges. A lot of discussion and controversy was centered around such subjects as mechanical instruments of music in worship, the work of the Holy Spirit, denominationalism, and "final things." It is interesting how history sometimes repeats itself. As we enter into this new century, these are some of the same issues that are splitting brethren and creating destructive division today. However, they are all important topics and we must never shy away from a sincere search for the truth. They subject of "final things" preoccupies the minds of many in the religious world. One of the topics is about the duration of Hell, and it seems to be resurfacing again as a point of controversy and confusion. As we acknowledge that the Bible is the only source of information about matter of faith and practice, we are compelled to see what it has to say about this important issue.

A large number of religious people believe that when an unfaithful soul is sentenced to "everlasting punishment" by God, on the day of judgment, that it means an annihilation of that soul into non-existence. Many say that God will reward the righteous with everlasting life in Heaven but will not sentence anyone to Hell. Or, if they go so far to say that there is a Hell, they say it only lasts for a moment until the soul is completely consumed and exist no more. Individuals or groups who hold this view are Annihilationist. Let us consider what the Bible says about this idea and some of its teachings on Hell.

In Matthew 25:46 Jesus says the wicked, "shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into eternal life." The word "eternal" in this passage makes the duration of Heaven the same as that of Hell. However long the life is, that will also be how long the punishment is. Therefore, the two are identical in duration. A position that holds life to be eternal in this verse must also say that punishment is eternal as well. Otherwise, an inconsistency is present. The Annihilationist does **not** hold

to eternal punishment but **will** say there is an eternal reward. Such a wedge cannot be driven in to this verse as some attempt to do. This verse shows the two to be identical in duration. Although the word, *aiionios*, sometimes means “age-long,” it should be rendered “eternal” (endless duration) when speaking of final destinies. These destinies pertain to the final age, an age that participates in God’s eternal nature. This line of reasoning is fortified by the fact that five verses earlier (Matthew 25:41) Jesus says that the wicked will share the same destiny as the Devil, who according to Revelation 20:10 will suffer endlessly in the lake of fire.

Annihilationists try to get around the plain teaching of this verse in a variety of ways. The Jehovah’s Witness religion has its own translation of the Bible, which is published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society with its mysterious scholars. It is called the New World Translation and it blatantly mistranslates Matthew 25:46. It renders the word *kolasin* as “cutting off” instead of “punishment.” However, this is contrary to what Greek scholars say about the definition of the word. It does not refer to cutting-off, but instead to a penalty or divine retribution. The attempt by those in support of brief punishment is to say that this cutting-off, pruning, or slaughter describes the nature of punishment as annihilation. They arrive at this conclusion by connecting this idea of “pruning” to the words of Jesus in Matthew 13:40-42 where he is talking about the tares being gathered and burned in the fire. Some argue that because combustible materials are used to describe eternal punishment, then the wicked man’s punishment will amount to annihilation. Passages such as Matthew 3:10, 12; 7:19; John 15:6; Hebrews 10:27; 12:29, and several passages for the Old Testament, could conceivably be interpreted as teaching annihilation but that does not mean that they **should** be interpreted that way. In fact, they should **not** be so interpreted due to the abundant Scriptural testimony that Hell-fire speaks of the pain of the wicked, not their consumption. For example, if we consider further Matthew 13:40-42, where Jesus explains the meaning of the weeds being cast into the furnace, he does not speak of consumption. He is instead warning of suffering. He describes the “fiery furnace” as a place marked by anguish, not extinction! The parable of the rich man and Lazarus uses fire imagery in the same way. The rich man died and found himself “in hell (hades) where he was in torment.” The reason for his plea of mercy is “because I am in agony in this fire” (Luke 16:25, 28). Plainly, fire speaks here of “agony” that one suffers in a “place of torment” (Luke 16:25, 29) with no hope of relief. This passage clearly uses Hell-fire imagery and that imagery unmistakably equates fire with torment!

Annihilationists also try to teach that the word “destroy” in places like 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 9 and Matthew 10:28 means to “utterly wipe out.” However, we must compare this definition to other passages to see if it applies. In Hosea 4:6 the Israelites “are destroyed for lack of knowledge,” and in 13:9 they have “destroyed themselves,” but the very

next phrase says that “in the Lord there is help.” How can the Lord help them if they are already “wiped out?” We must work to understand properly the meaning of the word “destroy.” Jesus is not speaking of annihilation when he says in Matthew 10:28, to “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.” This is corroborated by a similar passage in Luke 12:5 where Jesus warns: “Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell.” The destruction mentioned in Matthew 10:28, therefore, is equivalent to being thrown into Hell. Also, we must understand more about the meaning of this word *apollumi* (destroy). Depending on the context, it can be accurately translated: destroy, kill, lose, be lost, perish, be ruined, die, pass away, or lost. For example, the same word is used in verse 6 of Matthew 10 and translated “lost.” The best way to understand the word “destroy” in passages like 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 9 and Matthew 10:28 is to understand that it refers to a “wretched and ruined existence.” A person can take a baseball bat and destroy a vehicle (put it in a ruined and wretched state) but the vehicle is not annihilated. The same is true for the soul. The wicked soul will endure for all time in a ruined and wretched state in Hell. The Bible teaches that Hell is a real place (Mark 9:43-48), a place of no rest (Revelation 14:11), and a separation, fire, weeping and gnashing of teeth, punishment, death, and destruction. It is not a place where we would want to spend eternity.

The doctrine of annihilation makes death the extreme penalty by God. This is not according to scripture which speaks of a “much sorer punishment” than death for those “who hath trodden under the foot of the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:29). The study of Hell and its painful reality should motivate us as faithful soldiers of Christ. It should stir a deep desire within us to do our best to teach salvation of God from such a terrible fate. God is all love and kindness and does not desire “that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). However, God’s nature also demands justice. Note carefully Romans 11:22, “Behold therefore the goodness **and** severity of God.” Heaven is the place where God dwells and it is a prepared place for a prepared people (John 14:1-3). Hell is a prepared place for an unprepared people (Matthew 25:41). Is your soul prepared to meet the Lord? By God’s saving grace and our positive response of obedience to that grace we have the opportunity to escape this dreadful abode of Satan and his angels. We are making a choice in our lives by our actions. We are either choosing Heaven or Hell. There is no other option. There is “limbo” or “middle ground.” It is either one or the other: Heaven or Hell. May we never forget that Hell is a real place and that we must obey Jesus to escape its everlasting torment.