HEAVEN OR HELL, WHICH?

In the “Second Front” section of the Star-Telegram, Sunday, June 18, 2006, appears an article by Richard N. Ostling of the Associated Press entitled, “Religious beliefs going to you-know-where, some fear.” The subtitle is, “Whatever happened to hell? And what about heaven? Scholars sense that belief is weak.”

Some religious folks seem to come to the conclusion there is a heaven but it is something that cannot be described in terms one can understand. In addition, heaven is different things to different people. That is not surprising to me, seeing that most religious people in the world care very little about what the scriptures say, but rely on their emotions and feelings.

Years ago when I was in the construction business, I was building a church building in a small town in northern Oklahoma. I got into a discussion one day with the “pastor” who was a young guy, kind of a renegade, according to his own account, who was being “punished” by his superiors by sending him to this “jerkwater town” as he called it. The subject got around to the afterlife and he informed me that all of heaven and hell was right here, on earth. I asked him if his members knew he believed that and he replied that they did not and he was going to keep it that way.

So the idea of negating heaven and hell is nothing new. It has been around for a long, long time, but perhaps not as much within the religious community as now.

To show that most folks don’t have a clue about heaven and hell is just to look around and read the news. There have been a lot of Hollywood people die over the last few years, and almost to the last one, someone has suggested they are in heaven, doing what they did on earth. For instance some suggested George Burns, “was wisecracking to God,” and Frank Sinatra was “crooning in the heavenly choir.”

Such is the understanding, or should I say misunderstanding, of heaven and what it entails. The Bible is very plain “Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters,
nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor 6:9-10 ASV)

Then of course there are those who believe in heaven they say, but do not believe in hell. How can this be? The same Bible that tells us of heaven also tells us of hell. How can one believe one and not believe the other?

One of the things mentioned in the article referred to above is that “Few saw themselves hellbound.” The article also states that some people are confused for they believe in heaven and not God. So much for the people who say they believe the Bible. They are confused because their believe is subjective, whatever they want to believe is alright with them, and with some church leaders as well.

I like the Bible description of heaven. “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven of God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, (and be) their God: and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away.” (Rev 21:1-4 ASV)

The Bible is also just as explicit about hell, “And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” (Rev 20:9-10 ASV)

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