

THE "H-WORD"

From 1994 Annual Report by Dr. Wendell Kempton

It could stand for *Holiness, History, Honesty, Humility, Honor*, etc. Those are all good words, which have a vital role in Christianity.

However, this "H-WORD" is referred to by American Church Historian, Martin Marty. He capsulizes the "H-WORD" with a terse and indicting manner when he says, "*Hell disappeared. And no one noticed.*" That is alarming! That is also true. When was the last time you heard a message on the "H-WORD"? I have shared before that in my 44 years of being saved, I have heard two...one of which I preached. Since this is being read by everyone associated with world missions and evangelism, the question is, "*When was the last time you preached or taught on this very important subject?*"

The "H-WORD" does not get near the attention that it did 50 years ago. Today it hardly is mentioned. And we are talking about conservative, Bible-believing leadership. It is frightening how we can become so neglectful and careless. We who are Biblicists, who exposit the Scripture...teaching the book from cover to cover.

It does seem that the only response to the "H-WORD" is an occasional mention from the pulpit or when liberals take their stand and disavow. Several years ago, George Kaufman of Harvard Divinity School said that we have gone through a transformation of ideas and stated, "*I don't think there can be any future for heaven and hell.*" Covering this subject, *Newsweek* states, "*Today, hell is theology's H-WORD, a subject too trite for serious scholarship.*"

Hell has always been mentioned more in profanity than pulpits, and it has always been under attack by liberals. How could a God of love ever allow torture and punishment in hell? That question is asked sincerely. Often brilliant scholars have sought to nullify this important place spoken of in the Scripture. Rank liberal, Bishop Robinson, in his famous book, *Honest to God*, writes:

"Christ...remains on the Cross as long as one sinner remains in hell. That is not speculation; it is a statement grounded in the very necessity of God's nature. In a universe of love there can be no heaven that tolerates a chamber of horrors; no hell for any which does not at the same time make it hell for God. He cannot endure that, for this would be a final mockery of his nature. And he would not."

Other questions are presented to all conservatives who believe in the fundamental tenants of Scripture. "*How could a good God send good people to hell?*" It is a sobering question. It stirs our hearts since we all know very good people, some within our own families. If we answered from our hearts of compassion, we may "budge", "give a little ground" or at least become a "tiny bit" conciliatory. For after all, the punishment for these kinds of people do not seem commensurate with the sins they have committed. I remember witnessing to our next door neighbor over dinner. He was a successful businessman. After listening to the Gospel presentation, he said, "*I don't think I could have anything to do with a God that would send anyone to hell.*" I read about one man who said, "*{he} would not want to be in heaven with a God who sends people to hell.*" His preference would be to be in hell, so that he could live in defiance of such a God. He said, "*If such a God exists...he is a devil.*" Man becomes defiant, stern, defensive and emotional when it comes to where he is going to spend eternity.

However, as often as those questions are asked, there is another one of greater implication for those of us in WORLD EVANGELISM. "*How can a good God send anyone to hell who simply never had the opportunity to hear the message of Christ?*" It seems unfair. It seems unjust. Or, as one author wrote, "*It's like capital punishment for a traffic violation.*"

Liberals, universalists, Jehovah Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists have traditionally denied the existence of eternal punishment and eternal hell. But a nearly unbelievable thing has been taking place within evangelicalism. More and more discontent regarding eternal hell abounds among their scholarship. At a symposium at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, in May 1989, an emotional discussion arose around whether those who deny eternal punishment could be called evangelicals. It is now known that this view is sweeping into Evangelicalism. In fact, it is announced that 33-1/2% of all evangelicals deny eternal punishment. This is a sad scenario. History records that the failure to balance conviction and compassion dilutes doctrine. The failure to confess our inability to comprehend GOD, His ways, His works and His person, always places man in a dangerous position of asking questions that cannot be answered to his satisfaction. Then man places himself in a higher position than God. He does not admit it, and may not intend to do so. But there are important things of God that may not make good sense to man. These are things that are irrefutable and are a part of His secrets. Man's mind is restless, delving into areas that are only fully known to God. He comprises. He capitulates. He allows his mind to be distorted by other men's minds. Minds that cannot equate GOD'S HOLINESS with GOD'S JUSTICE, or GOD'S LOVE with GOD'S WRATH. Therefore, they fail to believe all of God's counsel. One of man's greatest challenges has been that of believing what God has said. Things that are pleasant as well as things that are unpleasant. Man's mind fails to be rational when he earnestly believes there is a possibility of receiving punishment which he believes is unwarranted or unfair.

We do not have all the answers...never will. But the first thing we must do is to begin to see hell from God's perspective. Man's failure to believe in hell began when he viewed it from man's viewpoint. Salvation has always been an act of mercy, not justice. **God is God, man is man. Thus God can and does have mercy upon whom He will have mercy, and justice upon whom He wishes to have justice. He has that right. He is God. He needs no counsel. And he is unimpressed by our attempts to get Him to see things from our points of view.**

Edwin Lutzer, Pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, writes: *"As far as we know, if He had so desired, God could have created a universe free from sin and corruption or rebellion...Lucifer could have been either exterminated or confined to another planet. Even better, Lucifer himself could have been created with a nature that would have never desired to oppose God..."*

"Yet the fact is that God set up a world in which there would be rebellion and the awful consequences of sin, a universe with both a heaven and a hell. Since we know that the Almighty works all things according to the counsel of His own will, we must believe that even unbelievers in hell will bring honor to His name and magnify His attributes, among them His attribute of justice."

GOD'S WAYS ARE PAST FINDING OUT. HIS WAYS ARE ALWAYS SUPERNATURAL. Man's requirement is only to read and believe. This is one of those areas of Divine justice that man finds difficult to accept. His mind often rebels. However, it is certain that the doctrines of Scripture find man in a hopeless condition. He is headed for judgment and wrath. Therefore, all of us need to take heed to the following:

"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But, after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil; of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good; to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God." Romans 2: 1-11)

God does promise eternal judgment in warning upon warning. Christ spoke, *"and these will go away into everlasting punishment..."* (Matthew 25:46). There are three Greek words that are used for hell. You are aware of them but they must be cited:

1. *Tartarus* is used in II Peter 2:4 for the abode of evil angels who sinned during the time of Noah. It states that God did not spare angels when they sinned but cast them into hell (pits of darkness) where they are reserved for judgment. Jude 6 also uses *tartarus*.

2. The most often used name for hell in the Scripture is *gehenna*. This word was used by the Jews before Christ and is derived from the Hebrew "Valley of Hinnon" found in the Old Testament (Joshua 15:8, II Kings 23:10). It was in that valley that Jews sacrificed to pagan deities. They also used this valley outside Jerusalem for the disposal of their garbage. Christ referred to hell (*gehenna*) as a place where *"their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched"* (Mark 9:44, 46, 48). Christ used the word *"hell"* eleven times in the New Testament. He spoke more of hell than of heaven.

3. *Hades* is the third word and is often misused by people when making reference to hell. *Hades* is reserved for use as a place where unbelievers presently go to await the GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT. In the King James translation, *hades* is translated *"hell"*.

So how do we respond to all of this? Have we become so educated and modern in our ways that the concept of eternal judgment no longer moves our hearts? Do we constantly warn people of impending eternal damnation?

It is a real place. It is a place that is described in the Bible as:

1. A place of torment. Christ spoke of the *"fire of hell."* Revelation 14:10 & 11 says, *"tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image..."* "Fire in hell" has stirred up argument. Is it literal? Is it figurative? We know hell will be hot...*"the fire of hell."* I definitely agree with one author who said, *"There is no reason the torments of hell could not include physical fire, since the bodies of those present will have been re-created and made indestructible. Unlike our own present bodies, those of the resurrected dead will not burn up or be extinguished. Literal fire is a possibility."*

The torment of hell is also a fire of unfulfilled desires that are never satisfied. Desires and lusts never subside. The tortured conscience is "electric". It never ceases to send "shockwaves" of reminders that are full of evil. Proverbs 27:20

says that insatiable desires of the nether world and a man's lusts are never satisfied. The immoral will burn with craving, yet will never be satisfied. The drunkard will cry out for a drop of liquor but there is no tavern to satisfy his eternal longing. Hell is like a raw nerve linked to an indestructible body. It is like living in an open sewer that is a volcano of continuous eruption. Hell is the largest oven God ever made and the flames of torment will burn forever.

2. It is a place of personal concern and excellent memory. In hell there are no Alzheimer's cases. Vivid recall...no short memory loss. And there is great concern regarding repentance and evangelism of loved ones left behind. The rich man requested Abraham to send Lazarus with a direct and personal message from hades (a place of torment, yet not as bad as hell). The rich man loved his family and thought about them constantly. The highest priority in hades is to warn people not to go there. Evidently, everyone there knows more about God than we realize. They evidently understand the imperative of an eternal relationship with God...even how one comes to God. The rich man's utmost request was for Abraham to send Lazarus to preach repentance to his brothers. Can you imagine being in hades with a constant evangelist's heart for your loved ones left behind? And if the message finally got to them, they would not believe! Even though it was given by one resurrected from the dead.

There is no memory loss in hades or hell. Rather an IMPOSSIBILITY TO FORGET. One of the greatest torments of hell is the impossibility to go insane...to lose it all. And this is the plight of everyone there. *"...for I am in agony in this flame."*

3. Hell is a place of FOREVER and FOREVER. Few of us comprehend eternity. When we try, it usually is in reference to heaven. But just think, Eternal Judgment! Lutzer helps us in our comprehension when he asks, *"How long is eternity?"* He states:

"Visualize a bird coming to earth every million years and taking a grain of sand with it to a distant planet. At that rate it would take thousands of billions of years before the bird had carried away a single handful of sand. Now let's explain that illustration and think how long it would take the bird to move the Oak Street Beach in Chicago and then the other thousands of beaches around the world. After that, the bird could begin on the mountains and the earth's crust.

"By the time the bird transported the entire earth to the far-off planet, eternity would not have officially begun..."

There is no good way to illustrate the graphic reality of suffering for eternity. One truly cannot even mention the word *"time"* when referring to eternity. There is no place for *"time"* in eternity...**just forever and forever and forever.** Just think as we read this line, the rich man in hades is still there! He is still longing to receive a drop of water. He is still waiting for his final judgment in the lake of fire. He is still concerned about why he made bad choices as he lived in the lap of luxury. He still thinks of poor Lazarus who made the right choices. He still longs to be released from the horror chambers of hades...and he knows he is doomed to suffer hell forever and forever. Sir Francis Newport, who scorned and ridiculed Christianity was heard saying these words on his deathbed:

"Oh that I was to lie a thousand years upon the fire that never is quenched, to purchase the favor of God, and be united to Him again! But it is a fruitless wish. Millions and millions of years would bring me no nearer to the end of my torments than one poor hour. Oh, eternity, eternity! Forever and forever! Oh, the insufferable pains of hell!"

These are but a few of the characteristics of hell. Jonathan Edwards was a strong Calvinist and considered an astute theologian. It is said of his ministry that he preached on hell more than any other theologian. He described hell in his famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.*

"Unconverted, men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen... There is a dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of God; there is hell's wide gaping mouth open; and you have nothing to stand upon, nor anything to take hold of, there is nothing between you and hell but air; it is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up....His wrath burns against you like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else than to be thrown into the fire...you hang by a slender thread, with the flames of Divine wrath flashing about it and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder."

Our mission in life is so serious. We stand between men and God. Many times we feel the agony and pain of man's wretched pride. Unable to admit to their need of redemption, blinded by the angel of light and traveling down the "broad road" that leads to destruction.

But why are we fundamentalists so quiet these days? Do we really believe in our heart of hearts the

teaching of Christ regarding hell? Do our prophets fear the response of people in the pews? Are our colleges and seminaries staffed with instructors who have lost sight of the future Judgment?

And why have evangelicals vacillated? Why are some of them questioning and debating this issue? Why have so many in the camp surrendered their public stand on hell? No one reading this report would ever have predicted that the conservative theological journal, *Bibliotheca Sacra* of Dallas Seminary would ever allow the article, "The Fate of Those Who Never Hear." It was written by Millard J. Erickson who is Research Professor of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth. It appeared in the January-March 1995 edition. Erickson uses his pen to raise questions regarding God's justice and man's eternal state. After one reads the article, it would be easy to wonder whether the author would also question: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; the ark, Noah and the rainbow; the choice of Israel as God's chosen nation; Jacob and Esau and the eleven references Jesus used in warning about hell and hades. One wonders if Erickson would also question a God who allows any kind or form of suffering during man's days on earth. Regarding Christianity and other religions he writes:

"Traditionally Christians have tended to be condescending toward other religions, regarding them either as idolatry, or as clouded or mistaken constructions of the revelation that has been given to all persons. However, as a result of a closer contact, Christians need to ask about the status of these individuals and their religions. What should be the Christian's attitude toward them? Should they be evangelized, or should they be regarded as 'fellow travelers,' who though they express themselves differently, are bound for the same place?"

Also, no one would have dreamed that the issue of annihilation would be debated among evangelicals. It has only been in the minds of liberals...both Protestant, Roman Catholic and the cults. But in recent years, the evangelical world was shocked when often-quoted evangelicals John R. W. Stott, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes and John Wienhem declared themselves as believers in the teaching of annihilation. Needless to say, serious setbacks have occurred among evangelicalism in recent days. One cannot afford the "heresy" of questioning God and His wisdom, nor Christ and His teaching without ultimately declaring **SPIRITUAL BANKRUPTCY**. It's only a matter of time and the *doors of evangelicalism* will close. When the doors of confidence swing on the hinges of man's brilliance, rust easily develops and soon there is breakdown and closure.

However, we also must sound a siren of warning to ourselves. We must be careful of our intelligence. We need not only guard our hearts but renew our minds. Defection often comes from trained minds. As a mission, we are far more intelligent than ever before. Many of our missionaries, our staff and our Board members are well-educated. Many have earned advanced degrees. It is at this time that we need to heed warning signs. Trained minds have always been trained by other minds. **LEST WE FORGET** *brilliance* and *intelligence* often tangle with *wisdom* and *common sense*. When our minds become so well-trained that we begin to ask questions that God does not answer, we need not ask further questions. When that simple principle is not honored or practiced, man's mind begins to trespass into areas of thought that eventually leads to disbelief and defection. All intelligence must be sanctified or it will lead to patterns of thought that are of the flesh and not of the Spirit.

Recently I asked three engineers if they could measure one millionth of a millimeter. One millimeter is one-thousandth of a meter (0.04 inch). They responded that the measurement is now in angstroms (units used in measuring the length of light waves and equal to one ten-billionth of a meter.)

The engineers said that electronic microscopes could now measure five angstroms. They said that one-millionth of a millimeter would be ten angstroms and thus, an impossibility to measure. However, all admitted that if a computer chip is one-millionth of a millimeter askew it will not function properly.

I submit that a millionth of a millimeter, though it cannot be measured, is of utmost importance to the proper and perfect structure of GOD'S SOVEREIGN COUNSEL as found in His Word. **ALL OF HIS COUNSEL IS PERFECT** in measurement. There is nothing missing. There is nothing to be added or subtracted.

I further submit that when man's brilliance tinkers with God's justice...even one-millionth of a millimeter...he throws askew God's character and counsel. It results in failure...

- > to believe the totality of Scripture.
- > to believe the total teaching of Christ.
- > to believe God's sovereign plan of the ages.
- > to believe in God's right of MERCY and JUSTICE.

And it also...

- > diminishes the character of God.
- > impugns the integrity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- > scorns the Love of Christ on Calvary.
- > abrogates the unique message of the Gospel.
- > accuses God of being a liar.

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." No way around it. Wrath is not a good forecast. It is about eternal damnation. It is about HELL and HADES. It is not easy for an intellectual evangelical to receive. For some, they do not believe. They would rather intellectually fantasize God's love to the extent that God's justice becomes a nightmare...scary and tragic.

It's easy to give ground during a war that does not make complete sense to the human mind. It is easy to allow the ax to dull when it is not sharpened daily by the whole counsel of God. It is easy to capitulate when one cannot satisfy the conscience. When all of questions cannot be answered. When the rationale of Judgment seems cruel and offensive. When the intensity of Judgment does not jibe with a God of compassion and love. When it does not seem fair. When Bible scholars, pastors and missionaries begin to question God's ways of justice. When with their intellectual prowess they reluctantly refuse to read the exam given covering God's **FINAL DAY OF JUDGMENT**. And when HIS children fail to believe what HIS SON TAUGHT. Interpretation, covering difficult passages for man to receive, has always produced views that in the final analysis *played to the favor of man rather than the favor of GOD*.

How has all of this affected us? Has it adversely touched our motivation? Have we stayed on the front lines of evangelism? We know our primary focus for motivation comes from "*the love of Christ*" (II Corinthians 5:14). However, pure motivation also comes from another source. It was man's lostness and God's Judgment Day that drove Paul night and day. It was what caused him to testify in Acts 20, "*...I ceased not to warn you night and day with tears.*" This was serious business with Paul and it is equally serious for us. Where people spend eternity should provide a holy stimulus for the ABWE family. Like Paul, we also should become emotional. Our care and compassion should have seismic proportions toward those lost religious pagans...across the street or around the world.

Our vision of Judgment Day dare not be blurred. Christianity and the WORD OF GOD stand alone when it comes to telling the TRUTH. We must take greater initiative to snatch people from "**the fire**."

MACEDONIA

The vision of the dying world is vast before our eyes;
We feel the heartbeat of its need, we hear its feeble cries:
Lord Jesus Christ, revive Thy church in this, her crucial hour!
Lord Jesus Christ, awake Thy church with Spirit given power.

The savage hugs his god of stone and fears descent of night;
The city dweller cringes lone amid the garish light:
Lord Jesus Christ, arouse Thy church to see their mute distress!
Lord Jesus Christ, equip Thy church with love and tenderness.

Today, as understanding's bounds are stretched on every hand,
O clothe Thy Word in bright, new sounds, and speed it over the land;
Lord Jesus Christ, empower us to preach by every means!
Lord Jesus Christ, embolden us in near and distant scenes.

The warning bell of judgment tolls, above us looms the cross;
Around are every-dying souls how great, how great the loss!
O Lord, constrain and move Thy church the glad news to impart!
And, Lord, as Thou dost stir Thy church, begin within my heart.

